

DEMOCRATIZING BEAUTY: AVON'S GLOBAL BEAUTY AMBASSADORS AND THE
TRANSNATIONAL MARKETING OF FEMININITY, 1954-2010

BY

C2010

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in American Studies
and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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For the women in my family whose personal sacrifices and love made this possible:

Dianne Feitz

Ruth Oster

Daisy Lyon

Acknowledgements

To love people and the solitary work of archival research is bit of an oxymoron, or at the very least, an identity crisis in the making. Such has also been the experience of researching and writing this dissertation. For over a year, I have been geographically and emotionally separated from the friends and family I value most. Thank you for your patience and more importantly, for welcoming me back with open arms.

Since I entered the American Studies Program at the University of Kansas, I have viewed graduate school has a collaborative effort, primarily because I was lucky enough to be a part of the greatest graduate school cohort in the universe. Friends, thank you for sharing your ideas, laughter, and insights with me. Our time together has made me more curious about the world and more empathetic towards others, qualities that have profoundly changed how I think about myself, the world, and our place in it as scholars.

To the faculty and staff in the American Studies Program, thank you for cultivating an environment that promotes intellectual sharing and camaraderie. I am only now beginning to realize what a rare and special combination this is and its lasting imprint on my approach to teaching and scholarship. I am still not quite sure what to think of the ivory tower, yet my wonderful experience with the members of my committee and the faculty at KU over the years has shown me that intellectual generosity, kindness, and collaboration are still its greatest hallmarks. Joane, I especially want to thank you for your time, attention, and unwavering confidence in my ability as a scholar. You are an inspiring role model.

To my gal pals: What would I do without you? Your repeated reminders of who I am, where I am going, and why I should celebrate along the way have given me much needed confidence and faith throughout this process. I love and value your friendship, creativity, and individuality.

To the Hagley Museum and Library, thank you for providing the space, time, and resources I needed to write and think. In between dodging groundhogs and historical actors I found my identity as a scholar, a startling discovery that made this project more meaningful than I ever anticipated. To the dear friends I made there, thank you for the funny memories and shouldering much of my writer's angst. Sharing this experience with you has made all the difference in what has proven to be a fairly isolating experience.

Writing a dissertation is not easy. According to my mother, if it was, everyone would do it. Like usual, she is probably right. However, it is also impossible to dream small or falter when you've been raised by parents with endless amounts of love and support. Mom and Dad, thank you for believing in me and cultivating my love of learning. Mitch and Mark, thanks for keeping me entertained along the way. I am so proud of the men you have become the lives of integrity you lead. I love you all very, very much.

And finally, Santigold, thank you for providing an inspiring, female-centered soundtrack that kept me motivated. As for the Talking Heads, you got it right when you sang "The world was moving she was right there with it and she was/Hey, woo hoo/The world was moving she was floating above it and she was." The world is still moving, and much to her surprise, so is she thanks to good friends, family, and colleagues.

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Preface

I love lipstick. As I grew up I got bolder with my color choices, so by the time I entered graduate school, red lipstick had come to represent more than a fashion choice; it was also a statement about female independence, intelligence, and strength. I recognized its representational power long before I encountered Roland Barthes or Stuart Hall. In many ways, my affinity for cosmetics and beauty culture makes studying Avon a natural fit with both my personal and scholarly interest in critically exploring how the beauty industry has insinuated itself into our individual and collective identities, values, and behaviors as women and as consumers. Research on the creation and marketing of women's beauty also fit my longstanding attraction to understanding the social actors and cultural processes that have facilitated the sale and promotion of U.S. consumerism (goods, ideas, and services) outside the United States. Of special interest to me are the cultural intermediaries who "broker" the appeal and sale of consumer products. In my research on consumer culture, I found that theoretical accounts of globalization's totalizing consequences, the move to a post-Fordist world marked by "late capitalism," or the compression of time-space continua fell short in satisfactorily explaining to me how "globalization" actually worked in the concrete realms of culture and its production.¹ I wanted to get closer to the men and women who boarded planes, hobnobbed in board rooms, and wrote the marketing research reports and strategies that converted far-flung individuals into loyal consumers of U.S. goods. I wanted to understand how transnational capital translated a global

¹ See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Post-Contemporary Interventions. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991; Robert Antonio and Alessandro Bonanno, "A New Global Capitalism? From "Americanism and Fordism" To "Americanization-Globalization," *American Studies* 41, no. 2/3 (2000): 33-77; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford, UK ; (New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1989).

message into a local marketing campaign and to see if this process involved soliciting the aid and input from local advertising and marketing professionals who worked outside the United States.

My master's thesis addressed many of these questions as I explored how advertising executives in Hong Kong mediated the appeal of Philip Morris's iconic U.S. Western-themed "Marlboro Man" commercials for Hong Kong's changing youth culture in the 1970s. What originally seemed like a logical, pragmatic, and "easy" task of tracing the cultural dynamics of marketing U.S. products abroad became more elusive as I struggled to find archival collections that contained marketing materials for companies' domestic and international operations during the 1960s or 1970s. I followed a number of dead ends as I contacted archivists and museum curators for Budweiser Beer, Levi Jeans, and Coke-Cola. While each had its own museum and/or library available to scholars and the general public, the marketing plans, meeting notes, and information about the people who orchestrated their international expansion remained, for lack of a better word, privatized. Working in a field like American Studies where commitment to public education and intellectual freedom are central to the tenets of the discipline itself, made this even more frustrating, especially when one archivist explained that from a corporate perspective, my research interests could easily be interpreted as industrial espionage.

Gaining access to corporate materials is paramount to "doing" business history, consumer culture studies, and /or any other projects that investigate the intersections of business and its multifaceted influences on societies and individuals. The hurdle of finding publicly-accessible collections that fit my research criteria (i.e., international marketing materials for late twentieth century U.S. consumer products) was incredibly frustrating. After several false starts and research trips, I was thrilled to find the Avon Collection at the Hagley Museum and Library

where the expanse of materials surpassed my jaded and beleaguered expectations, and I was even more relieved and grateful after meeting the gracious and helpful Library staff.

During my time with the Avon collection, I realized that while strategic global media certainly played a role in facilitating Avon's global expansion, the power driving its rapid growth actually resides in the millions of women it has successfully recruited to sell its wares. I also discovered lipstick served many purposes at Avon. The first Latin American Avon Ladies in the 1950s used Avon's lipsticks to gain entry to their neighbors' homes. In 1960 as Avon's first director of public relations, Ms. Anna J. Figsbee aptly declared, "If there is one cosmetic that speaks an international language, it is lipstick." Ms. Figsbee's insight has proven to be true in many regards, and throughout this project, I have come to see lipstick as more than form of individual expression. At Avon, convincing women to buy and sell its lipstick has and continues to be a profitable geopolitical enterprise that delivers a commercialized brand of female empowerment centered on specific gender ideologies and notions of difference. Researching this project has surprised and challenged my previous assumption that advertising and the mass media are the ultimate cultural brokers for U.S. consumer goods. What I learned about Avon has forced me to rethink how people, and especially women, are integral to this process, and provided a new way to examine the gendered politics and practices of global commerce.

Introduction

Why study Avon? The simple answer is that Avon is one of the few publically accessible corporate archives that document the evolution of a U.S. beauty company into a multinational corporation. When I began my research, I thought I would be writing a cultural history of the gendered messages and prescriptive beauty advice Avon Ladies delivered around the world. I soon realized that Avon's archival collection provides the opportunity to examine issues that are larger, and in many ways, more significant than its global expansion. First, I wanted to explore how globalization works in a concrete, traceable way. Second, as a feminist scholar, I was interested in the gender ideologies and power relations involved in the global promotion and consumption of commercial beauty products. Third, as an American Studies scholar, I wanted to examine Avon's relationship to U.S. nation-state and how this relationship informed where Avon went, who it recruited, and the ideologies it attached to selling, buying, and using cosmetics. Finally, it was hard to ignore Avon's shifting place within U.S. popular culture. What was once an iconic cosmetics brand in the 1950s that spoke and represented the lifestyle of middle class, white, suburban housewives, today is marketed as a universal symbol of female economic empowerment. What caused this transition? More importantly, what does the Avon Lady's makeover tell us about the strategic ways gender, race, and nation are deployed to make "make-up" meaningful in the global marketplace?

To answer these questions, I immersed myself in Avon's corporate archives, housed at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware. The collection contains documents and ephemera that span over one hundred years of Avon's history. I began with materials that outlined Avon's earliest international forays in Canada, Panama, and Puerto Rico. I soon realized that to understand the cultural and gendered dimensions of Avon's international

expansion I needed to thoroughly analyze its ideological context during the Cold War in the United States. Throughout my research I moved back and forth between the U.S. and Avon's international materials, tracking how discourses of gender, nation, and race evolved between the 1950s and today. I realized that the "globalization" of Avon's operations resided with its ability to implement (or adapt) its direct, "at home" selling system around the world, a process that hinged on Avon's ability to recruit, manage and motivate women. This critical point led me down a separate road of investigating the emotional management of women's informal labor networks, and in the process, presented a complex set of answers to my original research questions.

By using transnationalism as a method to track the concrete, discernable practices that facilitated Avon's expansion outside the United States, it became evident that Avon operates very differently from other cosmetics companies that rely on retail distributors and the mass media to convert women into consumers. Direct selling capitalizes on people's personal relationships, networks, and most importantly, grants companies access to their private lives and homes. Women have, and continue to be, key to Avon's global expansion by facilitating the appeal of its products and providing social networks Avon can harness across and between state borders. While Avon designates these women as "independent sales agents," these intimate, one-on-one, private sales encounters are highly managed and coordinated through Avon's uniform, transnational management and motivation system. From the suburbs of the United States during the Cold War to its current forays in China, Avon executives have refined a number of emotional management techniques for their voluntary labor force by presenting the work of an Avon distributor as a community cause, crusade, and a beautiful way for any woman, regardless of race, age, or geography, to make her financial dreams come true.

Not surprisingly, the process of converting women into motivated sales agents relies upon a number of gender ideologies that shape the relationship between Avon sales representatives, the products they sell, and the meanings they attach to selling, buying, and using commercial beauty products. For most of its history, Avon's male leaders believed women were inherently in need of uplift, naturally interested in cosmetics, and inclined to chat, gossip, and bond over the shared experience of "making" each other up. With the right incentives and tools, Avon's male executives believed any woman could be converted into active, eager, and successful sales representatives. Becoming an Avon Lady complimented prevailing notions that women naturally belonged (and enjoyed) their role as homemakers, mothers, and wives, and selling Avon was presented as a way for women to "get out of the house" without abandoning her primary responsibilities to her husband and children.

While I anticipated Avon framing women as inherently connected to homes, a space easily conducive to selling gendered products, I underestimated the degree to which men were behind the scenes of the "feminine" business of buying and selling Avon. From the mid 1950s until the late 1990s, male executives managed, orchestrated, and oversaw Avon's domestic affairs and global expansion, an enterprise they couched in paternal notions of uplift for countries in developing world, as well as in the rhetoric they used to recruit female sales representatives. Presenting itself as a women's company (or women's work) has been pivotal to Avon's brand image and success, despite the fact that for most of its 128 year history, Avon's male executives have controlled its beauty empire.

I was also surprised at the degree to which Avon and the cosmetics it manufactures have served as ambassadors of the U.S. nation-state both in formal and informal contexts. Avon has consistently conflated women's ability to buy, sell, and wear make-up as an extension of

democracy and a benefit of a free market economy. Positioning Avon' Ladies as lipsticked guardians of the nation was especially prevalent during Cold War when women's domestic commitments were framed as a patriotic responsibility. Avon capitalized on this ideological and gendered division of labor and the United States post war economic boom, both of which provided a powerful ideological backdrop and the capital for its early international forays.

To better understand the historical context of this phenomena, the "transnational turn" in American Studies and work by transnational and post colonial feminist scholars can help us understand how at times women's social networks and collaborations transcend national and state borders and yet are restricted at others.² Within the field of American Studies, the "transnational turn" has been hailed by many as stemming from Amy Kaplan and Donald Peases' *Cultures of Imperialism* that examines "...the multiple histories of continental and overseas [USA] expansion, conquest, conflict, and resistance which have shaped the cultures of the U.S. and the cultures of those it has dominated within and beyond its geographical borders."³ Studying Avon offers the opportunity to examine intersections between U.S. state power and the globalization of U.S commercial beauty practices, a combination that requires us to rethink beauty as inherently private or apolitical. As historians and cultural studies scholars have shown,

² Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*, (Durham, N.C. Chesham: Duke University Press; Combined Academic [distributor], 2005).

³ "Post colonial feminist scholars have also explored the relationship between commercial culture and colonialism, like Inderpal Grewal's critique of the Mattel's Indian Barbie in *Transnational America* and Anne McClintock's discussion of commodity racism in *Imperial Leather*. Outside of these exceptions, most transnational and post-colonial feminist scholars' critiques of U.S. nationalism and empire-building neglect commercial culture as sites to investigate the gendered dimensions of U.S. expansionism. See for example Chapter 2, "Traveling Barbie" in Grewal's *Transnational America* and "Soft Soaping Empire" in Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

“beauty” is a powerful social and cultural construction with material consequences that shape physical bodies and identities.⁴

In this dissertation, however, I argue that “democratizing beauty” is also a geopolitical project.⁵ Avon’s direct selling system has and continues to capitalize on national and state differences by presenting Western beauty practices as key to modernity; ideal femininity as something achieved by consumption of beauty aids; and the work of an Avon Lady as a gateway to “civilized” society. Over the last sixty years, Avon has repeatedly framed women’s access to cosmetics in the United States in direct contestation with U.S. communist foes, first in Cuba and later in the U.S.S.R. Today, Avon has aggressively and successfully fought to expand women’s “access” to its goods in China, where a growing middle class of women are seen indicative of China’s ascendancy to a powerhouse in the global economy. Throughout my forays in the archive, I discovered that as a transnational corporation that supposedly knows no borders, nor has ties to any one particular nation-state, Avon’s global expansion is predicated on U.S. gender roles and consumption patterns, and political ideologies.

I was also surprised to discover the degree to which Avon’s philanthropy and public relations activities enabled it to navigate and capitalize on what could have been potentially dangerous or disruptive social movements (e.g., the 1970s U.S. ethnic pride, women’s liberation, consumer rights movements). Avon’s move to a more inclusive, multicultural corporate image

⁴ See for example Sheila Jeffrey’s, *Beauty and Misogyny : Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, Women and Psychology, (London New York: Routledge, 2005); Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World : Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

⁵ I draw on the insights of feminist scholars to underscore the gendered dimensions of international politics, nation-building, and global commerce, especially the work of Cynthia Enloe’s, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 1st U.S. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Also see Camron Michael Amin., "Importing 'Beauty Culture' into Iran in the 1920s and 1930s: Marketing Individualism in an Age of Anti-Imperialism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 79-95 (2004); Stephen Gundle "Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3 (2002): 95-118.; Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

in the 1970s was not spurred by a benevolent desire to uplift minorities in the United States or women in the developing world but a necessary strategy to recruit new representatives from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Soon after Avon became less interested in advocating specific behaviors and grooming practices for women and more focused on “representing” of beauty as an economic lifebuoy. By 1992, it adopted its official vision statement “to be the company that best serves women – globally” and set the stage for a new era in which selling and consuming Avon could solve women’s financial problems, regardless of her age, race, or geographic location.

By the end of my research, I realized I had inadvertently embarked on two separate, but interrelated projects. On one hand, this dissertation explores the processes by which Avon converts women into distributors, who in turn have facilitated the expansion of its beauty empire across a variety of cultural, economic, and geographic borders. On the other, it explores the meanings Avon attaches to the act of selling, buying, and consuming beauty products in an increasingly globalized world. Both have provided complex and multifaceted sites from which to explore the corporate discourses of feminine beauty and economic empowerment.

Method: Tracking Avon’s Transnational Discourse

This project also illustrates the theoretical and methodological dilemmas of using corporate archives for academic research. My specific research methods primarily include archival research, but my overarching methodology is rooted in discourse analysis to identify the power dynamics that shape the social relations and interactions between Avon’s executives, representatives, and the consumers they ultimately hoped to persuade.⁶ The Avon Collection,

⁶ I found Joey Sprague’s discussion of Sandra Harding’s delineation between methodology and methods especially helpful for this project. According to Harding, methods refer to the specific techniques used to gather and analyze

housed at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, serves as the official company depository for Avon Product, Inc.'s records from its inception in 1886 to the present. As a public depository, Avon allows its materials to be used for scholarly research, and its collection includes original charters, packaging and design templates, and domestic and international marketing and training materials.

I approach Avon's records as sources of transnational knowledge production and sites of national power that function as what Michel Foucault calls "repository of knowledge."⁷ Avon's archive exemplifies the regulation of the various discourses Avon produced about itself, although instead of merely regulating what counts as a linear history of Avon's global expansion, the history of how this knowledge was initially produced through museums and corporate sponsorship (e.g., the Hagley Library serves as Avon's official and paid depository for their corporate documents) is also subject to analysis. Michel Foucault suggests that archival collections present a "relatively stable system of functioning" that regulates the discursive formations that sustain a society's "regime of truth." Identifying the structures used to categorize the discourse in the archive can help unveil *what* can be said about Avon and thus "what can be thought" – or traced for a transnational study.⁸ The archive includes a surplus of materials in some historical time periods (e.g., 1950s-1970s) and while others are absent or time sealed, (e.g., mid 1970s to the present). Only a small percentage of Avon's current international subsidiaries are represented, most of which document Avon's early international forays in Latin and South America and Western Europe. Given these material constraints, I have contextualized and traced local, site-specific discourses and examined them within the larger,

information (e.g., conducting archival research, interviews, analyzing images, etc.) while "methodology" refers to how researchers use these specific methods. See Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*, The Gender Lens Series, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005) 4.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (1st American ed. New York,: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁸ Ibid.

overarching “transnational” discourses that emerged in Avon’s World Manager’s conferences, its corporate history, and most recently, its global branding endeavors mediated by the mass media.

My methodology also draws on the work of post-colonial scholar Ann Stoler, who advocates reading and analyzing archival materials “along the archival grain” to analyze how epistemological categories shape the content, scope, and limitations of topics that can be addressed in archival research.⁹ For example, records about Avon’s corporate social responsibility programs are abundant, which is not surprising considering that Avon’s archive operates as a corporate legacy project designed to promote, memorialize, and tout its historical commitment to bettering the lives of women. Analyzing Avon “along the archival grain” means I use the same categories, words, and descriptors in Avon’s primary source materials. Repeated references to women as “Ms.” and “Mrs.,” for example, reflects Avon’s reliance on prevailing sex and social mores for women within its corporate ranks throughout most of its history. When possible, I also use the same ethnic and racial designation as they evolved with Avon’s equal opportunity, affirmative action, and diversity programs.¹⁰

Democratizing Beauty

I originally titled this project “Enlisting Feminism: Avon’s Global Army and the Transnational Marketing of Femininity” to underscore the woman-centered politics Avon co-opted when it branded itself as “the company for women.” While selling and consuming beauty aids can rightly be called a “woman’s” business at Avon, its management and oversight has primarily been executed by Avon’s male executives until the late 1990s. Calls to action by

⁹Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1 (2002): 87-109.

¹⁰ For example, references to Avon’s corporate social responsibility programs in the 1970s are now discussed in terms of Avon’s global citizenship and indicate Avon’s expanding view and understanding of itself as a multinational company.

liberal and radical feminists in the 1970s did not refashion how men in the upper echelons of Avon's organization thought about women's capabilities to lead a multi-billion dollar company, even as they sought political office, flocked to college, and generated revenue that help stimulate the economy and the beauty industry. Avon's reaction to women's changing lives in the 1970s instead resulted from its ability to re-craft itself as an economic safety net for women seeking ways to supplement their families' incomes in a shifting, tumultuous economy. Throughout its history, few representatives have sold Avon for an extended period of time, and even less have relied on Avon as a source for full time employment. As other scholars have argued, female distributors in direct sales organizations often invest and purchase their company's goods while participating in an unskilled trade with limited accountability. The tangible rewards are often less than the emotional satisfaction and community they enjoy.¹¹

I also decided against using word "feminism" to characterize Avon's "pro-woman" corporate identity for fear of conflating Avon Products, Inc. with a feminist social movement, grassroots or otherwise. Avon is multinational corporation with a long, and at times, troubled history of constructing women as in need of inherent uplift and betterment to achieve their individual and collective dreams. This endeavor has historically relied upon and promoted limited definitions of femininity that resided on sexed, racial, classed, and national hierarchies and notions of difference. There is no doubt Avon's financial support and broad-based philanthropic activities have generated awareness, funds, and varying degrees of positive change

¹¹ Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, 11. Ara Wilson's ethnographic study of direct sales distributors in Thailand illustrates, women also reconfigure and adapt these messages to their individual and social identities. Wilson's study specifically explores the ways in which global capitalism transforms and intersects with people's individual identities and subjectivities in intimate ways that "seem non economic, and particularly their social identities" it creates "intimate economies." Because this study examines Avon's corporate persona and brand identity it constructed for itself, its representatives, and the public, and not on the intimate lives and representatives

for women around the world. However, Avon's recent branding efforts raise important questions about corporations' ability to frame, shape, and insert themselves into what is arguably the domain of civil discourse, especially given Avon's longstanding interest and strategic use of public domains, like schools, to further its interests. More importantly, Avon's desire to see itself as a company that serves and represents women requires us to contextualize the historical circumstances and corporate ideologies that led to its global expansion in the first place.

Instead of "Enlisting Feminism" I chose to title this project, "Democratizing Beauty: Avon's Transnational Beauty Ambassadors and the Marketing of Femininity" by drawing on William Leach's discussion of the "democratization of desire" that occurred in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century when the freedom to consume goods became equated with the political freedoms of a democratic society.¹² Avon has advocated a similar brand of consumer-oriented democracy, one that it refined in the United States and adapted for export around the world. In its early domestic and international ventures, Avon imbued its representatives with a spirit of service and championed the idea that any woman could be beautiful, as long as she had the know-how and help of an Avon Lady. As beauty ambassadors, they were given specific instructions on how to promote Avon's version of hygiene, beauty and modern living. Today, Avon markets itself as a collective rallying call for women's financial and physical well-being around the world. Its discourse of democratizing beauty has shifted from promising physical transformation to guaranteeing women economic empowerment.

I began this project with a willingness to let the transnational discourses in Avon's archive shape this project, and when Avon's corporate records left the United States, I followed. Tracking transnational discourses led me to geographic locales (e.g., Puerto Rico) and historical

¹² See William Leach, *Land of Desire : Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, (1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 3.

time periods (e.g., the 1950s) that I did not originally anticipate. To better isolate key moments in Avon's global expansion, each chapter examines specific discourses over the last fifty years that have helped produce and sustain Avon's far flung geographic reach and influence. Some examine these moments within the geographic and cultural/political/social context of the United States, while the others examine how they operated outside the United States, especially in Latin and South America. Together, they document the strategies Avon developed to harness the power of women's social networks to facilitate the global sale and appeal of its products. A critical examination of Avon's transnational history presents new ways to discuss the gendered dimensions of globalization and transnationalism; the emergence and global influence of U.S. and Western commercial beauty practices; the geopolitical dimensions of selling beauty; and the impact of popular social and political movements on corporate branding enterprises.

“The important thing is that they are not lambs led to slaughter...that of their own free will and accord women seek for beauty aids; they want to know about beauty products; they spend money freely to improve themselves.”¹³

- Toilet Goods Association, 1958

Chapter 1: Calling All Housewives: Avon Wants YOU 1950-1970

For some, references to Avon invoke images of Avon Lady of yesteryear who emblemized suburban monoculture and women’s domestic confines during the 1950s and 1960s. However, the Avon Lady of today is not the Avon Lady of old. Avon is a giant in the global beauty industry with direct investments and operations in sixty five countries and licensing and distribution agreements in an additional forty. Avon’s operations span over six continents, making it the world’s largest direct selling company, a system of selling that markets products and serves consumers in a “face to face manner.”¹⁴ Avon employs approximately 41,000 full-time, salaried employees, 35,000 of whom work outside the United States.¹⁵ The power behind Avon’s operation stems not from the salaried executives who coordinate its global marketing and sales or oversee its supply chain, but the six million independent contractors, the vast majority of whom are women, that sell Avon’s products.¹⁶ These women distribute over 700 million Avon brochures, printed in over twelve languages that rotate on a two to four week selling cycle to sell people cosmetics, toiletries, and apparel, jewelry, and home décor.¹⁷ This extensive direct-marketing distribution system, built on over 126 years of Avon’s experience in the cosmetics and

¹³ Reprinted in *Avon Direct Line*, April 1958.

¹⁴ Direct selling is the umbrella term used to describe person-to-person selling, although its organizational form and management take various forms. Avon’s original centralized management structure, for example, differs from multi-level or “network” direct selling companies like Amway that according to Nicole Woolsey Biggart, are characterized by sponsorship lines between distributors and whose distributors earn extra income by purchasing goods in volume. See Nicole Biggart Woolsey. *Charismatic Capitalism : Direct Selling Organizations in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 16-19. Also see the World Association of Direct Seller’s, “What is direct selling?” at http://www.wfdsa.org/about_dir_sell/index.cfm?fa=whatisd, Accessed on April 6, 2010.

¹⁵ Avon Products, Inc. website. <http://www.avoncompany.com/about/index.html>. Accessed April 6, 2010.

¹⁶ 2009 *Avon Products, Inc. Annual Report*. Accessed March 10, 2010. Available on Avon Product Inc.’s website at Available at <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/index.html>: Avon Products, Inc., 2010.

¹⁷ Ibid.

toiletries industry, makes Avon the world's fifth largest personal care company. In 2009 Avon generated over ten billion dollars in sales, eighty percent of which came from outside the United States.¹⁸ *Fortune Magazine* ranked Avon number four on its list of top household and personal care companies, and Avon leads its primary competitor in the global direct selling market, Amway, by over two billion dollars in sales.¹⁹ Avon also has over 90 percent brand awareness around the world, making it one the most well known and recognized global beauty brands today.

How did this happen? Before Avon could successfully tout itself as the world's leading distributor of cosmetics and toiletries in the global marketplace, it first had to successfully promote its "system of direct selling" as a desirable activity for women whose public role as guardians of home and hearth permeated U.S. culture during the Cold War. This chapter analyzes Avon's system of "at home selling" within the broader gendered culture of consumption and gender roles during the 1950s. Who did Avon recruit to sell its ware and how the company motivate, manage and train them once they agreed to be Avon Ladies? How did Avon's representation in the public sphere in national advertisements fit, shape, or challenge beauty culture and social life in the United States during this time? The first section explores the origins of Avon's "at-home" selling system and its place within the gendered landscape and consumption behaviors advocated in U.S. Cold War culture during the 1950s and 1960s. The second section examines the emotional management, training, and recruitment strategies that Avon developed for its growing sales force of suburban housewives and the democratic,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Business Index. Proctor and Gamble, Kimberly Clark, and Colgate Palmolive held the top positions. Estee Lauder followed Avon in the number five slot. Business Resource Center. Avon's revenue of 10.3 billion dollars in global sales surpassed Amway's of 8.4 billion. Mary Kay, Avon's other direct competitor in the direct selling beauty business, generated a revenue of 2.9 billion in 2009. See "Direct Selling News Global.," accessed on April 17, 2010 and available at http://www.directsellingnews.com/index.php/site/entries_archive_display/direct_selling_news_global_100_2009.

accessible, and distinctly respectable brand of beauty they delivered. It concludes by analyzing the various ways by which Avon cultivated a corporate image in its famous television advertisements and expanded Public Relations department that helped “at home selling” emerge as a central feature of American culture during the 1950s and 1960s.

Promoting Direct Sales, Democracy, and Domesticity during the Cold War

One of the most studied topics amongst U.S. cultural historians has been the role of consumption in reconfiguring and shaping notions of democracy, material well-being, and identity in the United States. William Leach traces the development of a new *culture* of consumption in the United States to the 1890s marked by a “democratization of desire,” in which the political ideologies of freedom, equality, and individual opportunity became equated with wage earning and the “freedom” to buy goods and live the American dream.²⁰ Aided by newly burgeoning advertising industry, ad men were charged with the task of promoting new time-saving, innovative goods that promised to solve people’s personal insecurities, improve their relationships, and ease their work.²¹

During this era mass produced beauty and hygiene products emerged as important commodities that shaped normative definitions of female beauty and behavior. Kathy Peiss traces the evolution of contemporary U.S. beauty culture to the early twentieth century during a

²⁰ Leach suggests this democratization of desire” was not initiated by a singular social or political institution, but arose from an emergent network of professional business managers whose involvement in churches, public schools, and municipal government helped aid consumerism’s far-reaching influence in the United States during the early twentieth century. This network, combined with the increasing influence of a newly professionalized advertising industry, transformed America from production, work-oriented nation to one in which the freedom to consume material goods emerged as a new feature of American democracy. See William Leach, *Land of Desire : Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, (1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 3.

²¹ See for example, Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1-22 and William Leach’s *Land of Desire*. For a discussion of the rise of the nascent public relations industry, see Richard Tedlow’s *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950*, Industrial Development and the Social Fabric; V. 3, (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1979).

time when women's magazines, the professionalization of commercial advertising, and the development of the Hollywood studio-system helped promote mass consumption of commercial beauty products. Peiss argues that together, these social and economic forces helped create a national beauty culture and gendered "system of meaning."²² Though many contemporary feminist critics have derided the beauty industry for promoting unattainable images of aesthetic perfection, women's historians have been keen to note women's active role in cultivating the business of selling beauty in the United States. Kathy Peiss's study underscores the pivotal role of female entrepreneurs like Helena Rubenstein, Elizabeth Arden, and Madam CJ Walker whose beauty empires began as small-scale enterprises during the beginning of the twentieth century, while Jennifer Scanlon illustrates the "behind the scene" role female copy writers at the J. Walter Thompson Advertising company played creating images, slogans, and messages in advertisements for women's beauty and hygiene products.²³

Along with the rise of the advertising industry, the 1890s also marked the birth of the traveling, door-to-door salesman.²⁴ One such travelling salesman, David McConnell, realized that demands for sample perfumes by his female customers proved more popular than his books and household trinkets, and in 1886 he established his own door-to-door sales business, the California Perfume Company(which would later become Avon), to cater exclusively to women.

²² Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. 1st ed., (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) 154. Besides accounting for class and racial differences in her analysis, Peiss outlines the economic and cultural forces that enabled "make-up" to emerge as a naturalized cultural practice and signifier of womanhood in America.

²³ Jennifer Scanlon, "Advertising Women: The J. Walter Thompson Company Women's Editorial Department." In *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, edited by Jennifer Scanlon, 201-25, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

²⁴ At the turn of the century when many companies distributed consumer goods through rapidly expanding city retail store or through mail-order catalogs, others championed the right of individual sales agents to deliver goods directly to peoples' homes. Walter Friedman argues that "salesmanship" was deemed a uniquely "American" in the sense that it built on America's spirit of entrepreneurialism, free enterprise, and economic competition born in the 1890s. It was also a predominantly masculine enterprise until McConnell and later, black female entrepreneur Madam CJ Walker, began recruiting women to sell cosmetics door to door. See Walter Friedman, *A. Birth of a Salesman : The Transformation of Selling in America*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004),4-11.

McConnell's most innovative strategy, however, was his decision to recruit a team of female-only sales agents to sell and distribute his products. Keenly aware of the reputation of travelling, door-to-door salesmen as hucksters and peddlers, McConnell consciously recruited women of good social standing to help craft a legitimate and trustworthy corporate persona for the California Perfume Company (CPC), beginning by hiring Mrs. Persus Foster Eourness Albee of Winchester, Vermont, as its first female sales agent.²⁵ Mrs. Albee helped McConnell recruit women of good repute to sell CPC's products, and within a couple of years, a network of traveling CPC female managers appointed female sales representatives in territories around the United States.²⁶ With Mrs. Albee and his female sales agents help, McConnell began the process of crafting a company persona that centered around notions of "trust" and respectability that he reinforced with a company guarantee that promised customers its products would be "...pure, harmless, and exactly as represented."²⁷

McConnell's decision to build his operation around an all-female team of traveling sales agents challenges prevailing historical narratives of "self made men" in America's entrepreneurial business discourse, as well as the gendered management strategies bureaucratic firms and small business developed to manage their female labor force in other industries.²⁸ Service and entrepreneurial opportunity came to define the CPC's workplace culture and

²⁵ "Great White Oak" and clippings in "Mrs. P.F.E. Albee, 1951-1981," Series 8: Box 125.

²⁶ Katina Manko, "Ding Dong! Avon Calling!": Gender, Business, and Door-to-Door Selling, 1890--1955." PhD Dissertation, University of Delaware, 2001, 40.

²⁷ "1904 Sales Catalog," Series 3: Box 113. McConnell devised a number other of rhetorical strategies that shaped the CPC's image, including positioning the company as a nurturing, family like environment that appealed to women. Meanwhile other door to door companies like Fuller Brush and Encyclopedia Britannica recognized the power and profit of "door to door," "at-home," and what today we call "direct selling." CPC was the only company in the early twentieth century to exclusively on women to sell, distribute, and consume its products. . See Walter Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 90.

²⁸ See Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930*, Gender Relations in the American Experience. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

company persona, and according to Katina Manko's study, motivating and inspiring women to sell became the cornerstone of CPC's business:

Positive thinking, goal setting, and evangelical spirit, characteristic of progressives, and religious philosophy, were rarely applied so directly to women. But in the world of direct selling, goals, prizes and the success ethic was more than a rhetorical trope, it was [a] central organizing feature of a business strategy. Developing positive thinking ideas and techniques was integral to the economic success of the individual and to McConnell.²⁹

CPC's recruiting literature and corporate image actively championed the right of women to sell its wares, and reap a profit, just like their male counterparts but was tapered by McConnell and other male executives' paternal management of the company.³⁰ CPC grew and flourished during the early twentieth century, first by developing a successful rural network of female sales agents during Great Depression, and later by expanding its urban sales force during the 1930s and 1940s.³¹ In 1929 McConnell changed the company name to Avon, the California Perfume Company's most popular line of cosmetics.³² Throughout the geographic, economic, and social changes women experienced in the United States during the mid twentieth century, McConnell and his team consistently promoted the idea that selling Avon provided women economic independence (an later uplift), the ability to make her dreams come true, and the emotional satisfaction of serving her friends and neighbors.

Avon's theme of service and uplift translated easily into the patriotic spirit and industry support of the U.S. government during World War II.³³ In addition to securing contracts and

²⁹ Manko, *Ding Dong! Avon Calling*, 63.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Chapter 4, "Avon and the Great Depression" in Manko's *Ding Dong! Avon Calling*.

³² Company lore today claims that McConnell chose the name Avon to honor of the birthplace of his favorite playwright, William Shakespeare. See "Avon History" Cosmetics Avon PowerPoint, 2008 and Avon's current corporate responsibility section on its website, <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-14-The-Avon-Great-Oak>, Accessed, March 4, 2010.

³³ As Lizabeth Cohen notes, during this time the economic health, prosperity, and well-being of the United States became increasingly linked to notions of patriotic consumption that helped the United States evolve into a

dedicating thirty percent of its production capabilities to manufacturing shaving kits for soldiers overseas, Avon paid tribute to women's patriotic wartime efforts in its "Heroines of History" advertising campaign that ran from 1944-1946 in women's magazines like *The Ladies Home Journal*. The ads featured women like Florence Nightingale and Dolly Madison and promoted Avon's commitment to the United States wartime efforts abroad using a distinctly female-centered iconography. Profitable wartime contracts and a healthy domestic demand for cosmetics and toiletries helped Avon emerge as one of the most lucrative U.S. cosmetics companies by the conclusion of World War II and generated an increasing demand for beauty products that spanned class and racial divides. By 1948 an estimated eighty to ninety percent of American women routinely used rouge and lipstick as part of their beauty regimen.³⁴

The postwar cosmetics boom helped Avon make its mark on U.S. culture, as well as generate the revenue it needed to expand internationally. By 1958, the U.S. cosmetics and toiletries industry generated approximately 1.32 billion in sales, and another 2.5 billion in related services and supplies.³⁵ The United States ascendancy to the world's largest industrial economy helped stimulate Americans' spending power, resulting in a post-war spending boom on homes, cars, kitchen appliances, and other non-essential fashionable items marketed to consumers across class and ethnic lines.³⁶ Lizabeth Cohen notes "...mass consumption in economy offered an arsenal of weapons to defend the reputation of capitalist society against the evils of

"consumer republic" which she defines as "an economy, culture, and politics built around the promises of mass consumption, both in terms of material life and the more idealistic goals of freedom, democracy, and equality. See Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 1st ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) 3.

³⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 245.

³⁵ Quote from Toilet Goods Association, reprinted in *Avon Direct Line*, 1958.

³⁶ See Shelley Nickles, "More Is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Post War America." *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2002): 581-622.

communism.”³⁷ Homeownership emerged as a tangible and affordable symbol of the post war American Dream for many families, despite the increasing segregation and/or exclusion of African Americans in new suburban communities.³⁸ A new federally-funded interstate highway contributed to a mass exodus of white and ethnic minorities to new suburban communities where their lifestyles were marked by a gendered division of labor; the presentation of a stable, happy, heterosexual marriage; and helping the United States win the war against communism through the conspicuous consumption of consumer goods.³⁹

As Elaine Tyler May notes, the political discourse from World War II to Cold War frequently invoked the stability and prosperity of a particular construction of the American family as the symbolic battleground where the United States government claimed salvation and victory against what they perceived as the growing threat of communism. Within this discourse of “domestic containment” and wartime preparedness, women’s domestic commitments to raising her children, feeding her husband, and supporting her country through her consumer purchases were framed as both a patriotic responsibility and a privilege afforded by the United States free-market economy.⁴⁰ Ample historical evidence that indicates that the culture of suburban life was neither monolithic nor uncontested given the number of new immigrants who revitalized urban centers and women fought to advance equal pay in various labor unions.⁴¹ By and large, however, the Cold War marked an unprecedented period in U.S. history where cultural

³⁷ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, Chapter 3, “Reconversion: The Emergence of the Consumer Republic,” 124.

³⁸ Nickels, “More is Better;” Cohen, Chapter 3 in *A Consumers Republic*, 113-147.

³⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. Fully rev. and updated 20th anniversary ed., (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 12-15.

⁴⁰ May notes, for example, Richard Nixon’s famous “kitchen debate” with Nikita Khrushchev during a 1959 visit to Moscow where he claimed United States superiority by referencing the affordability of new household products like washing machines and dishwashers that made the lives of all American women easier, regardless of their social class. See Chapter 7, “Commodity Gap and the Modern Home,” 153-173.

⁴¹ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Post War Mass Culture, 1946-1958.” In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-190*, edited by Joanne J. Meyerowitz, 229-62. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.

and political life converged to actively promote the stability of the “nuclear” family that produced specific expectations and social norms for women.

A post war culture defined by domestic containment and a growing number of Americans moving to suburban neighborhoods ushered in a new era of recruiting at Avon during the 1950s and early 1960s. Increased spending on Avon’s national television and print advertisements, along with upper level management’s newfound emphasis on coordinated training for Avon’s female sales representatives helped the company refine and refocus its mission after World War II.⁴² As early as 1946, Avon President John Ewald expressed worry that Avon’s male managers had forgotten the fundamentals of the direct-selling business in their quest to capitalize on military contracts.⁴³ Ewald reintroduced David McConnell’s guiding philosophy that Avon’s female sales agents, and the women they served, lay at the heart of Avon’s business. According to Manko, returning to McConnell’s core mission required reeducating Avon’s male managers about the “feminine” side of Avon’s business:

Teaching men ‘the business’ meant teaching them how to treat ‘a Lady. ...highlighting the paternalistic relationship between Avon and the Avon Lady, which existed at a level in which gender and the feminization of business practices was both paramount and necessary.’⁴⁴

Avon revised representatives training materials to address the lifestyle, values, and social norms of women residing in the suburbs. This renewed celebration of women’s domestic duties laid the groundwork for a corporate culture and Avon’s massive growth during the 1950s and 1960s, even as Avon’s definition of femininity and opportunities for its female employees remained relatively limited for the next thirty years.⁴⁵ Avon’s male managers went to great lengths to

⁴² Avon Annual Report, 1954.

⁴³ Manko, *Ding Dong!*, 274.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 274.

⁴⁵ Avon’s female executives and upper level managers will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

connect the benefits of direct selling to a culture that advocated a renewed commitment to domestic life. According to Avon Vice President Nathan Chadwick, personal, at-home sales benefited busy housewives and mothers whose domestic responsibilities limited their shopping time, and thus afforded them the convenience of a personalized shopping experience without ever leaving their homes.⁴⁶ Chadwick described at-home selling as a citadel, "...impregnable in its strength" to satisfy consumers' needs face to face, and provide expert knowledge and personalized service, qualities he lamented were disappearing with the rise of mass merchandising and retail stores.⁴⁷ Other companies, like Tupperware, also recognized the revenue in centering their marketing efforts around women's literal and symbolic connection to their homes.⁴⁸ In 1950, however, Avon still accounted for over seventy percent of cosmetics sales in the at-home or "direct sales" industry and helped lead the way for the feminization of the at-home selling industry.⁴⁹ Its coordinated sales programs designed for new era suburban living helped its net profits increase from over 4 million dollars in 1954 to over \$37 million a decade later, causing *Fortune* magazine to declare it as having the highest profit margin of any other *Fortune* 500 company that year.⁵⁰ Avon's sales were more than twice its two leading retail

⁴⁶ N.C. Chadwick gave his "Impregnable Citadel" speech at the National Association of Direct Sales Annual convention in 1960 which was later circulated to Avon employees in 1967. In this address Chadwick uses the term "at-home" or "personal sales" repeatedly. The term "direct selling," has replaced "at home sales," a difference that underscores the degree to which Avon's sales relied on women calling on other women at home, rather than office lunchrooms or other informal environments Avon advocated by late 1980s. See "Impregnable Citadel" by N.C. Chadwick., RG II, Series IV, "Rationale Direct Selling, 1954-1973," Box 117.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Tupperware's at-home party system quickly spawned a number of other at-home party systems during the 1960s to today. See Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Sociologist Nicole Woolsey Biggart notes that before World War II, less than 15 percent of the direct sales industry in the United States consisted of women. By the 1980s, women comprised over 80 percent of direct sales representatives. See Biggart's *Charismatic Capitalism*, 2.

⁵⁰ "Avon! The Sweet Smell of Success," by Seymour Freegood, *Fortune Magazine*, 1964. RG II: Series 1, Administration: Box 110.

competitors, Revlon and Cheesebrough-Ponds, and more than ten times higher of the Fuller Brush Company, its closest competitor in the door-to-door sales business.⁵¹

Calling All Housewives: Avon wants YOU

While Avon's corporate structure and divisions were managed by male executives, the task of recruiting women to sell Avon fell on the high-heeled feet of Avon's female city and district sales managers. These full-time, salaried female employees recruited, trained, and most importantly, motivated sales representatives who sold Avon in exclusive territories of approximately 200 households.⁵² If the United States public and political culture touted a universal rights for [white] Americans to equate their freedom with their right to purchase affordable, quality consumer goods, these themes emerged with specific gendered connotations in Avon's 1950s and 1960s recruitment literature. Throughout its history, Avon's sold itself as an attractive business opportunity for women by touting the commissions representatives earned from their sales, as well as other incentive prizes and fellowship with other women. During the 1950s, most of Avon's female sales representatives did not hold full-time job outside their homes, and Avon managers actively recruiting housewives whose husbands provided their families' primary source of income.⁵³

Nicole Woolsey Biggart's sociological study of the U.S. direct selling industry and the evolution of its organizational culture shows that unlike management strategies firms often used to increase worker's productivity, direct sales organizations developed management practices that appealed to their representatives' emotional or moral sensibilities to unite them with a common purpose and to manage, or control, their voluntary sales force. One common technique

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957.

⁵³ *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957.

included transforming representatives into “new selves” that fit the organization’s mission, as well as celebrating group membership.⁵⁴

One of Avon’s primary emotional management strategies was to transform housewives into self-fulfilled Avon representatives. Management newsletters repeatedly reminded managers that selling Avon was a possible cure for housewives who might be bored, a condition a psychologist in one article cited as “...one of the most destructive of our emotional states.” Editors reminded women that “Anything that influences your emotions helps counteract boredom, “...recognition, praise, rewards, a goal, bonuses, changes in environments, deadlines, and social strivings.”⁵⁵ Despite acknowledging women’s potential feelings of social isolation and/or boredom, nothing in Avon’s recruiting literature or the advice given to its female city and district sales managers implied that representatives abandon their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers.⁵⁶ According to management newsletters, busy, organized mothers who ran their households efficiently embodied the same qualities of Avon’s high-earning, successful representatives and were ideal recruits. By selling Avon, women would actually be happier, more efficient, and well-adjusted homemakers. As one manager newsletter stated, “...give a busy woman a job and she’ll do it well.”⁵⁷

To help women balance their home lives with growing their own Avon business, Avon promoted itself as a flexible social activity women could adjust to their daily schedules. Avon’s

⁵⁴ Woolsey Biggart. *Charismatic Capitalism*, 135-156. Biggart draws on Max Weber’s theory of social system typology of control to better understand how direct selling organizations (DSOs) establish moral authority to exact desired results and actions from its members. Biggart argues that DSOs do not exhibit direct control like other economic institutions, but have a “charismatic” control system whose mission-oriented towards “securing the ‘inner justification’ flows from the belief in the missions correctness.”(135). David McConnell’s autobiographical account of CPC/Avon’s history was reprinted in 1968 and distributed to Avon employees to regularly remind them of these values.

⁵⁵ *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957.

⁵⁶ *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957; *Avon Direct Line* July 1960.

⁵⁷ *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957.

female managers were instructed to capitalize on women's unspoken desire to leave the mundane routines of their housework behind while also assuring them that selling Avon could invigorate her spirit, cure her boredom, and infuse her domestic responsibilities with a new sense of purpose. Avon reminded zone managers that they should emphasize money wasn't the only thing Avon offered - recognition, praise, and satisfaction of achieving their goals were intangible rewards that also counteracted boredom.⁵⁸ To reinforce this idea, images of frumpy women in housedresses were transformed into smiling, professionally-dressed sales representatives sporting the Avon Lady's signature hats and pearls in Avon's manager newsletter.⁵⁹

Avon executives also strove to create a family, community-oriented atmosphere. Avon's male executives encouraged female managers to send birthday, sympathy, and anniversary cards, they felt lead to "better human relations and a happier organization."⁶⁰ Weekly Monday Sales meetings were touted as social events where representatives could socialize, play games, and try Avon's new products. In reality, they constituted one of the primary modes for Avon to introduce new sales incentives, products and sales strategies. Another crucial management technique recognized women's individual sales achievements, a practice that distinguished Avon from other direct-selling organizations that often instituted sales quotas.⁶¹ In 1956 Avon introduced its Jeweled Pin Award Program to honor representatives who sold \$1,000 worth of products within in given time period.⁶² Members were encouraged to wear their pins when calling on customers and at their weekly sales meetings to symbolize their status as elite sales

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Time for a Pat on the Back;" and "A New Lease on Life...selling Avon" *Avon Direct Line*, June 1957; *Avon Direct Line*, March 1959.

⁶¹ "Avon! The Sweet Smell of Success," by Seymour Freegood, *Fortune Magazine* 1964, RG II: Series 1 Administration, Box 110.

⁶² *Avon Direct Line*, 1956.

representatives and regularly featured Avon's representative newsletter, *Avon Outlook* as inspiration to other women.⁶³ Avon's male division managers recognized that "treating women well" was key to their business and worked to develop a management system *Fortune* magazine described as a lucrative and successful "...steady stream of encouragement, congratulations, and personal counseling."⁶⁴

Since its founding, another one of Avon's emotional management techniques has been to position itself as company dedicated to serving people, rather than merely as a manufacturer of beauty and toiletry products.⁶⁵ In the booming cosmetics industry of the 1950s and 1960s, Avon's managers reminded representatives they had an opportunity and a *responsibility* to serve the other women and what Avon declared as their universal desire to be beautiful. Avon's female beauty editor prepared new educational materials that underscored this democratic spirit: "Beauty is every woman's right and privilege...the effect of beauty can be had by every woman, regardless of age, who wants it."⁶⁶ Avon and other cosmetics companies had long promoted and linked notions of a universal, achievable form of feminine beauty with the purchase and application of commercial beauty and hygiene products. Beginning in the early twentieth century, companies created advertisements that positioned rouge, lipstick, and other face paint as products that promised to improve women's internal constitution and character, rather than marketing them as goods one might vainly rely on to change their physical appearance.⁶⁷

As the beauty and cosmetics market continued to grow in the 1950s, Avon increased its research and development for new products. It also developed extensive training programs to

⁶³ "Stars of Avon," *Avon Direct Line*, August 1957.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Congratulations are in order!" by Mr. Paul Gregory, *Avon Direct Line*, March 1960.

⁶⁶ "What about New Customer Counselors?" By Miss Patricia Neighbors, *Avon Direct Line*, 1960.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 5, "Promoting the Made-up Woman" in Peiss's *Hope in a Jar*, 134-166.

cultivate Avon Ladies as “experts” in the beauty business. Managers encouraged representatives to purchase Avon’s color charts and training guides that explained new products and beauty trends (e.g., drawing “winged mouths” and arched eyebrows). Avon Beauty Counselors also offered beauty clinics where representatives received hands on training. One counselor in 1957 remarked, “It’s amazing how many representatives do not know how to use make up and don’t use cosmetics except lipstick. This is an important part of training Representatives to sell! After all, they are in the beauty business and customers expect them to be experts in make-up.”⁶⁸

Avon’s New Products Director, Irene Nunemaker, believed that Avon’s new cosmetics had to “bear the responsibility” of appeal and good taste to help representatives exude confidence during their sales calls and to instill consumer confidence in their authority.⁶⁹ After being appointed an exclusive territory and paying an eight dollar “order taking fee,” new representatives attended a nine week training course where they learned the basics in skin care and color cosmetics trends. For five additional dollars, they could purchase a copy of Avon’s expert beauty book, in addition to the catalogues and samples needed for product demonstrations. District managers reminded representatives that the more they invested in supplementary training, kits, and product samples, the more commissions they would earn as customers would come to respect their authority as beauty experts.⁷⁰ After new representatives completed their training, managers encouraged to “make themselves up,” and show “gay smiles” when they embarked on their sales calls.⁷¹ Avon’s emphasis on expertise in its training materials reflects a broader trend in U.S. culture when a discourse of scientific innovation and improvement produced a range of “experts” who advised women on how to handle their marital

⁶⁸ “Beauty Conferences” *Avon Direct Line*, May, 1958.

⁶⁹ “Story of Avon,” *Avon Direct Line*, Oct. 1957.

⁷⁰ *Avon Direct Line* July, 1960.

⁷¹ *Avon Direct Line*, November 1960.

problems, cook delicious meals for their families, raise well-adjusted children, and in Avon's case, how to tastefully apply color cosmetics.⁷² In addition to encouraging representatives to invest in their Avon business by attending beauty clinics and purchasing illustrated guides, Avon relied on its representative newsletter, *Outlook*, to communicate information about the latest beauty and fashion trends, new products, and beauty practices.

Beginning in 1960, Avon's coveted "product demonstration" became the focal point of much the training and motivational advice it dispensed to representatives. In addition to encouraging representatives to invest in product samples, catalogues, and carrying, the "five point" sales demonstration let customers see, hold, feel, and smell Avon products. This interactive experience concluded with the representative "telling" the customer its product benefits, technologies, and multi-varied uses. The guiding philosophy that shaped Avon's "at home" demonstrations stemmed from managers' belief that the power of at home selling, in addition to the convenience it offered to busy housewives, encouraged women to "talk" and "play" with make-up. Avon representatives were told that women who might be too shy or nervous to experiment with new trends like color eye-make-up in the daunting environment of a department store could easily be persuaded to try these techniques with the guidance of their Avon Lady.⁷³ From articles in *Outlook* newsletters to the advice district managers dispensed at their weekly sales meetings, Avon representatives were told that all women shared a universal desire to be beautiful.⁷⁴ During this time, Avon produced a discourse that equated beauty with self-improvement that any woman could achieve as long as she had access to the know-how of a trained Avon representative and could see the effect of Avon's products for themselves. Avon

⁷² May, *Homeward Bound*, 151-152, 140-142.

⁷³ "Story of Avon," *Avon Direct Line*, October 1957. The implications at home-sales demonstrations had on American women's beauty culture in the 1950s and 1960s will be discussed in conjunction with their export to Latin American markets in Chapter 3.

⁷⁴ "Cosmetic Career Women," *Avon Direct Line*, November 1957.

managers reminded representatives that cosmetics were not supposed to change their customers, but instead help them “...make them look and feel prettier.”⁷⁵

In the late 1950s Avon designed step-by-step instruction brochures for representatives to leave with their customers to reinforce its representatives’ authority and expertise. These “At-Home Beauty Counselors” were designed to supplement the representatives’ beauty advice and provided step by step advice on how to apply foundation, draw in their eyebrows, or wash their faces. Avon aimed to make beauty accessible and easy for its customers by teaching the “average woman” the “dos” and “don’ts” of cosmetics application.⁷⁶ Whether or not women followed the prescriptive beauty advice Avon representatives or the brochures they left behind is difficult to ascertain; however, when combined with the product demonstrations and representatives’ visits, these “leave behind” brochures show the range of techniques Avon developed to influence women’s grooming and beauty practices. Avon’s access to the private homes and its ability to educate consumers was one of its primary competitive advantages in the 1950s and 1960s. When combined with the mobility of a trained sales force who delivered Avon’s advice, Avon’s power to disseminate specific beauty practices surpassed that of other cosmetic companies who relied primarily on the mass media or department store to educate women about the art of beauty.

In the 1950s Avon expanded its democratic spirit of providing good grooming and hygiene products by creating products for teens, young children, and men.⁷⁷ As one of the early forerunners of innovative, theme-inspired packaging, Avon led the market in creating unique

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Customer Counselors,” *Avon Direct Line*, January, 1958.

⁷⁷ This reflected a growing trend within the industry of segmenting consumers along ethnic, classed, gendered, and generational lines. For an extended discussion of niche and market segmentation in the beauty industry during the 1960s, see Chapter 8, “Identity and the Market” in Kathy Peiss’s *Hope in a Jar*.

containers to appeal to its expanding customer base. To promote men's grooming products as hyper-masculine rather than as "effeminate," or worse, products that appealed to homosexuals, Avon's cologne decanters revolved around stereotypical masculine hobbies like drag racing and boating.⁷⁸ For most of the 1950s and early 1960s, however, Avon remained focused on developing products for women and refining its motivational techniques for its expanding team of middle-class, white suburban beauty ambassadors. As a direct sales organization that literally bypassed middle men, Avon successfully deployed themes of individualism and democratic uplift designed to resonate with mothers and housewives, while also promoting itself as a fun, flexible form of socializing that did not impede women's role as the guardians of American family. In the process, Avon both tapped into and exploited a discourse about women's "universal" desire to be beautiful, a dream made possible with the help of Avon's expertly trained, mobile female sales force.

In 1957 Avon reprinted an article that touted direct-selling as one of the few employment opportunities that did not discriminate on age nor sex and gave women the same earning potential as their male counterparts.⁷⁹ From its founding in 1886, Avon has linked sale representatives' successes to their work ethic, commitment, and enthusiasm for selling Avon rather than its organizing structure, the quality and appeal of its products, or larger economic, political, geographic, and social constraints that shaped women's selling environment.⁸⁰ In reality women did not own their own business, but worked as independent sales agents who paid a licensing fee, or "order taking privilege" to distribute Avon's products.⁸¹ Representatives

⁷⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 260.

⁷⁹ The excerpt was from an article in *Charm Magazine*, a magazine dedicated to working women in the late 1950s. Reprinted as, "Career Women's Magazine Praises Direct Selling" in *Avon Direct Line*, Oct. 1957.

⁸⁰ "More about Recommendations," *Avon Direct Line*, June 1959.

⁸¹ Nicole Biggart Woolsey traces the designation and term "independent sales agent" back to the 1930s when the National Association of Direct Sales lobbied the Federal Trade Commission to exempt direct sales organizations

made 40 percent commission on sales over 30 dollars, and were told that their individual sales territories could generate 100 dollars per sales cycle.⁸² In addition to paying a licensing or “order fee” that gave them the right to distribute Avon products in their territory, Avon representatives were encouraged to purchase sales catalogues, brochures, order forms, and product samples out of pocket, and also paid shipping fees to receive the products.⁸³ Avon continued to promote the idea that its representatives “owned their own business,” despite the fact that women had to invest considerable time and money before their first sale occurred. According to Manko, during the 1950s Avon’s recruitment pitches failed to match the limited economic rewards of most Avon representatives:

Money was a dream; a living would have been a delusion for in its advertisements while Avon women seemed in charge of their households, even the highest level of earnings projected in recruiting literature would have never provided enough resources to manage a home and family on their own. The average annual sales (approximately \$450 per representative) was barely half of the lowest earnings projection in the recruiting manual) assuming that a representative worked for a full year.⁸⁴

Despite the fact that Avon representatives did not actually *own* their own business, selling Avon provided women the opportunity earn extra money, socialize, and trade beauty secrets and tips with their female neighbors. But, as Elaine Tyler May notes, like many other “pink collar” jobs available to women, selling Avon did not challenge dominant perceptions about women’s primary responsibility to their domestic duties nor did it undo broader gender inequalities pertaining to equal pay, discrimination, or women’s advancement within corporate

from federally-mandated employer laws that guaranteed full time employees minimum wage and other benefits like social security pensions. See Woolsey, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 40-41.

⁸² *Avon Direct Line*, July 1960.

⁸³ In 1960, Avon charged representatives eight dollars to sell Avon. During most of the 1950s, representatives Avon representatives earned 25% commission on the net sales under 100\$, and 40 percent on orders totaling over \$100 or more. As Avon’s popularity increased during the 1960s, representatives were expected to sell more in order earn their 40 percent commission. See Manko, *Ding Dong!*, 206-209; *Avon Direct Line*, July 1960.

⁸⁴ Manko, *Ding Dong!*, 288.

America.⁸⁵ Avon relied upon and re-inscribed prevailing cultural and political beliefs in the United States that saw women as secondary wage earners, whose income was intended to be rechanneled into purchasing products, especially discounted Avon products, for themselves and their families. It also capitalized on the culture of consumption and gendered division of labor that defined post war living in the United States.⁸⁶

By 1964, more than 300,000 Avon representatives sold and distributed Avon's products in territories across the United States and proved to be the key to Avon's skyrocketing profits that quadrupled from 1954 to 1964 and generated over 36 million dollars in profit.⁸⁷ During this time, Avon also enlisted the aid of women within its corporate headquarters. While the vast majority of executives at Avon remained men, women like Irene Nunemaker, Patricia Neighbors, and Alla O'Brien served in key executive positions at Avon in the 1950s and 1960s where they identified beauty trends and translated them into new products and demonstrations for representatives to use on their house calls. Much like the women employed in advertising agencies to create copy and creative concepts that appealed specifically to women readers in the 1920s, these female executives played an active role in shaping and refining the type of "beauty" Avon represented in its products, newsletters, and training manuals.⁸⁸ As full-time, salaried employees, Avon's female city and district managers also possessed a great deal of influence in shaping Avon's beauty and work culture by appointing new representatives and motivating and retaining current ones through weekly sales meetings and regular correspondence.

⁸⁵ Women's labor historians have documented a range of women's resistance and organizing efforts that varied across class, ethnic, and professions. See collected essays in Ruth Milkman's edited collection, *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of Us Women's Labor History*. Boston: Routledge, 1985. As a voluntary sales force, the labor and compensation Avon representatives performed differed significantly from women in industrial sectors and clerical positions, and instead centered on emotional motivational strategies that emphasized entrepreneurship. See Manko's "Ding Dong! Avon Calling," 122-128.

⁸⁶ May, *Homeward Bound*, "The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home," 153-173.

⁸⁷ Manko, *Ding Dong! Avon Calling!*, 258.

⁸⁸ Scanlon, "Advertising Women: The J. Walter Thompson Company Women's Editorial Department."

While the labor of developing, marketing, and selling Avon's beauty products was carried out by women, Avon's upper level management and organizational culture remained male-dominated. In 1950, 168 female city managers; 500 assistant managers, and 300 district managers worked together to manage Avon's 300,000 representatives. According to Manko's estimate, less than one percent of women at Avon worked as managers.⁸⁹ The business of understanding and uplifting women was managed, or "guided" by men at all levels of Avon's corporate structure, beginning with the men who served on Avon's Executive Board of Directors to the chain of managers throughout its Advertising, Manufacturing, Branch Management, and Field Operation divisions. Avon's manager newsletters regularly highlighted the contributions of its male employees a "Salute to Avon's Men" section that reminded female city and district managers of their leadership skills and strategic planning that made Avon the market leader in direct sales.⁹⁰ Avon's masculine corporate culture also enlisted the aid of executive's wives, like at the 1960 National Association of Toiletries Convention where Avon's wives entertained the spouses of visiting delegates.⁹¹ The upward mobility and proclamation that selling Avon helped women achieve their individual dreams was far from universal, especially with regards to female representatives and employees' ability to ascend Avon's corporate ladder.⁹² Avon's troubled relationship between its claims to empower women while failing to promote them within its corporate structure, as well as the dilemmas the company faced in the wake of the women's liberation movement will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. Avon's universal declaration of opportunity and uplift did not apply equally to "all" women in the United States either. Like many white-owned cosmetics companies, Avon more or less ignored the purchasing

⁸⁹ Manko, 258.

⁹⁰ "Salute to Avon Men," *Avon Direct Line*, February 1958.

⁹¹ *Avon Direct Line*, March 1960.

⁹² The evolution of Avon's affirmative action and equal opportunity hiring practices will be discussed in the next two chapters, but during Avon's rapid expansion in the 1950s and 1960s, white men possessed the majority of power and executive decision making at Avon.

power of black consumers during the first part of the twentieth century, but strived to become more racially inclusive in the 1960s, a topic explored in Chapter 4.

The Avon and the Public Sphere: Advertising and Public Relations in the 1950s and 1960s

Avon began the nascent steps of cultivating a corporate image steeped in images of respectable, middle class domesticity with its first national advertising campaign in a 1936 issue of *Good Housekeeping* and later in popular women's magazines during the 1940 and 1950s.⁹³ Yet it was Avon's famous "Ding Dong! Avon Calling!" television commercials that began airing in 1953 that cemented the Avon Lady's rise to iconic fame in Cold War culture. Created by the Dreher Advertising Agency, these national advertisements reminded viewers of Avon's prestige as a leading manufacturer of beauty and toiletry products, the specialized training and service of its representatives; and Avon's unconditional, customer-satisfaction guarantee.⁹⁴ They hit a nerve with the American public, primarily because their creative concept reinforced the literal and symbolic space Avon representatives sold their wares: in women's homes. By 1959, "Ding! Dong! Avon Calling" commercials reached a remarkable 98% of households whose televisions were quickly becoming America's most popular entertainment medium.⁹⁵

Avon commercials also occupied a space in the visual landscape of American mass culture by advocating prescriptive behaviors and consumption patterns for women. The most outspoken and influential critic of white women's confinement to domestic living, Betty Friedan, famously challenged the monoculture and cult of white women's domesticity in her 1957 book,

⁹³ "Avon Advertising History, 1936-1954," RG I: Series7: Advertising Scrapbooks, Subseries A, Box OS-14.

⁹⁴ "How Avon Opens Doors with Spot TV," *Avon Direct Line*, March 1958.

⁹⁵ "As others see Us" by George Shine, *The Avon Essence*, Oct. 1965. Shine described Gallup's methods as including soliciting viewers' opinions of Avon, as well as the degree to which they compelled people to try or buy Avon. By 1965, Avon reached 99.7% of television viewers. For discussions about representations of women, family structures, and race and its connection with television as a new entertainment form, see Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, A Camera Obscura Book, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.)

the *Feminine Mystique*, while more recent feminist historians like Joanne Meyerowitz note that a more nuanced set of messages about gender ideologies circulated in popular culture during this time.⁹⁶ However, Avon's male executives and the Dreher Advertising Agency crafted a corporate image that reinforced prevailing public attitudes that American women's primary identity and responsibility resided with her domestic responsibilities as a mother and wife. Avon's television advertisements underscored "home" as the Avon Lady and customer's domain by utilizing images of housewives throughout its print and television commercials. Avon supported its extensive efforts to (re)educate the American public on the virtues of at-home shopping from 1955 to 1959 with its "Take Time Out for Beauty" print campaigns that ran in seventeen different women's magazines alongside its popular television commercials.⁹⁷ More than an ideal lifestyle to which viewers were supposed to aspire, these images reinforced the degree to which Avon's entire enterprise relied on and literally required women to be home to receive their Avon representatives.

Avon's insistence on utilizing domestic space as the site of an Avon Representative's work reinforced similar messages and images about women's domestic responsibilities in American popular culture during the 1950s and early 1960s. Underground or pulp culture in the 1950s often presented complex images of sexually attractive or desirable versions of feminine beauty, while representations of women in mainstream commercial culture in the 1950s often vacillated between two stereotypes; the sultry seductress, Marilyn Monroe stereotype and the

⁹⁶ See Joanne J Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture '946-1958" in *Not June Cleaver : Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, 229-261, Critical Perspectives on the Past, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). Meyerowitz specifically examines the messages about marital relationships, family, etc. as they were articulated in popular women's magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*.

⁹⁷ "Avon Advertising History, 1936-1954," RG I: Series7: Advertising Scrapbooks; Subseries A, Box OS-14.

less threatening image of singer/actress Doris Day.⁹⁸ As one of the most popular, patriotic pin-ups in during the Korean War, Day's appeal was cemented by her role in popular Hollywood romantic comedies like *Pillow Talk* that presented a sanitized, sexually chaste version of heterosexual femininity similar to the Avon Lady's. Avon made a conscious decision to avoid using sex appeal in its advertisements and product names, especially in the fragrance market where its perfumes *Here's My Heart* and *To a Wild Rose* competed alongside racier brands like Lanvin's *My Sin* and Dana's *Tabu*.⁹⁹ According to Avon's President, Wayne Hicklin, "We've never gone for sex appeal in advertising...we wanted to appeal to people of all kinds, so we purposely stayed away from the *My Sin* approach, and knock on wood, it's worked."¹⁰⁰ While individual receptions of Avon's "Ding! Dong! Commercials!" and the limited brand of femininity they represented were likely varied and contested, market research conducted by Gallup Polls during the late 1950s and early 1960s indicated that the commercials resonated with female viewers and generated a positive image and demand for Avon's products.¹⁰¹ By 1965, Avon reached 99.7% of television viewers. As a result of its widespread popularity and appeal, Avon used its "Avon Calling!" theme with a few variations until 1967.¹⁰² Unlike the new directions Avon would take in future advertising and public relations campaigns, the sound of Avon's now famous doorbell chimes signaled the arrival of a white, middle-class woman who delivered a specific brand of feminine respectability along with her perfumes and lipsticks.

⁹⁸ For further discussion of this dichotomy in representations of women in post war popular culture see Chapter 6, "Pop Goes the Pin-up" in Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls : Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*, (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006), 236; and Carolyn L Kitch's *The Girl on the Magazine Cover : The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ RG II: Series 1, Administration: "Avon! The Sweet Smell of Success," by Seymour Freegood, *Fortune Magazine*, 1964, Box 110.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "As others see Us" by George Shine, *The Avon Essence*, Oct. 1965. Shine described Gallup's methods as including soliciting viewers' opinions of Avon, as well as the degree to which they compelled people to try or buy Avon.

¹⁰² According to Avon's official corporate history, this made "Avon Calling" one of the longest running advertising campaigns in television in history. See Laura Klepacki's *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2005) 169.

Television and print commercials were not the only way Avon presented and maintained the respectability of the Avon's Lady's public persona. In 1963 Avon announced the creation of a separate Public Relations division led by Miss Alla O'Brien, who was described in Avon Sales Manager's newsletter as, "...smart, attractive, and has a wonderful sense of humor."¹⁰³ Unlike the mass advertising campaigns, Avon's Public Relations department helped it establish its moral authority that acted on behalf, and for the public's interest.¹⁰⁴ Roland Marchand notes that as early as the 1890s, U.S. companies began investing and creating what he calls a "corporate soul" to justify their increasing presence and influence in American public and private life; to promote a sense of public good will; and to cement their moral legitimacy.¹⁰⁵ Miss O'Brien's role in Avon's newly expanded Public Relations department served a similar function as the liaison between Avon and the American public and a "personal touchstone" and the public could "talk to."¹⁰⁶

In addition to coordinating press releases and answering public inquiries about the cosmetics and direct selling industries, Avon's expanded Public Relations department began developing educational films for high school students that provided tips and advice on grooming, hygiene, and cosmetics regimes for youth, a practice many other cosmetic companies had been employing in high school home economics classes since the mid 1930s.¹⁰⁷ Avon began marketing products specifically for teen age girls beginning in 1960 with its *Pretty in Peach* and

¹⁰³ "Top Note", *Avon Essence*, June 1963.

¹⁰⁴ Business historian Richard Tedlow defines public relations as "...the controlling of news about an individual or organization by planned and organizational effort through informing and cultivating the press and through encouraging the corporations itself to alter its policies in accord with perceived public desires." See Richard Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950*, Industrial Development and the Social Fabric ; V. 3, (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1979) xvii.

¹⁰⁵ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Marchand argues that corporations are not huge, monolithic organizations but dynamic institutions where dominant voices win out after and with contestation with others.

¹⁰⁶ "Top Note", *Avon Essence*, June 1963.

¹⁰⁷ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 252.

followed a few years later with *Wishing* fragrances and *Blazer* cologne for young men.¹⁰⁸ By 1962, its School Program had distributed promotional hygiene materials to eight million students and teacher training materials for 22,000 home economics teachers.¹⁰⁹ As Amy Sue Bix notes, home economics classes increasingly became sites where young women learned about new kitchen appliances and other technologies to successfully manage the “science” and skill of making a good home.¹¹⁰ In her reoccurring columns Miss O’Brien reminded Avon’s managers of the mission of service Avon touted to increase sales an emerging youth market. One booklet in particular, “Cosmetics by Avon” touted the benefits of direct selling as “one of the oldest and most respected methods of distribution in the world.”¹¹¹ Besides outlining guidelines for “proper” grooming and hygiene rituals for young men and women. It also promoted direct-selling as an extension of America’s free-market system and democracy:

Not the least of our rights as human beings is the right of free enterprise...the ability to establish and maintain a business, to create goods and services and to distribute them....Free enterprise is even as familiar as the Avon representative who calls at your home. For she is in business for herself, selling quality products and reaping the rewards – both financial and personal- of her own initiative.¹¹²

By extending its public relations activities into America’s public schools, Avon found a captive audience to promote its products and gender-specific grooming habits, as well as an opportunity to tout direct-selling as emblematic of America’s democratic spirit of free enterprise. Between 1962 and 1972, 35 million students in the United States had viewed Avon films or read

¹⁰⁸ “Avon and the Teenage Market” *Avon Direct Line*, April 1960; 1965 *Avon Annual Report*, 10.

¹⁰⁹ “Someone to Talk To,” by Miss Alla O’Brien, *Avon Essence*, September 1966; “Avon makes the Scene with Teens,” by Alla O’Brien, *Avon Essence*, Oct 1967. This later program also included materials and posters for minority teachers and students, marking one of the first public relations campaigns designed specifically for Minorities.

¹¹⁰ Amy Sue Bix, “Equipped for Life: Gendered Technical Training and Consumerism in Home Economics, 1920-1980,” *Technology and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2002): 728-54.

¹¹¹ “Cosmetics by Avon, 1967,” RG II: Series 1: Admin, Box 111.

¹¹² It also discussed the scientific innovation and quality control standards Avon used to develop a range of products.

promotional materials on health, hygiene, and grooming in their home economics classes.¹¹³ In 1965 Gallup Poll ranked Avon's television commercials as having the number one advertising impact and effect of any cosmetic company.¹¹⁴

When combined with the grooming advice and educational materials Avon disseminated to American teenagers across the country, the Avon Lady had evolved as a popular female icon in Cold War American culture. Avon created an image of white, middle class respectability that centered on women's connection to their homes, families, and communities, as well as positioning its beauty products as essential ingredients to their good taste. In a few years, this image of middle class, suburban utopia would emerge as an unwitting counterfoil to the rebellious spirit, non-conformity, and sexual permissiveness of the counter culture. In the meantime, the Avon Lady had carved out a space for herself on the couches in America's suburbs. Many of the students Avon educated on the democratic spirit of direct selling and the social benefits good grooming would begin questioning prevailing cultural assumptions of the 1950s and early 1960s about type of work, sex, and relationships expected of them as young adults. Avon's Educational Services Department tried to remain abreast of these changes by sponsoring teen advisory panels and surveying teens about social issues, an opportunity Avon touted as giving teens a forum in which to express their opinions, but also an opportunity for Avon to refine its segmented advertising for a new generation of consumers.¹¹⁵

Despite the winds of change stirring in America's youth culture, in 1968 market research showed Avon's popularity stemmed from American women's belief that Avon represented

¹¹³ "Address by David Mitchell Before First World Congress of Direct Selling Companies," May 22, 1972, RG II, Historical Files, Series 4:, Selling Methods, Box 118.

¹¹⁴ "As others see Us" by George Shine, *The Avon Essence*, Oct. 1965.

¹¹⁵ See for example, "A Survey of Teenagers' Opinions on Critical Social Issues," "Series 8: Marketing. Sub A: Market Research and Development, Market Research Reports, Box 63.

“someone like me.”¹¹⁶ At Avon, that “me” represented middle class, white, suburban homemakers it had successfully appealed and enlisted during the Cold War’s containment culture. Avon’s Vice President of Advertising, George Shine, announced that unlike other companies that produced “fad” and “flower-power advertisements for hippie oriented consumers,” Avon’s advertising would remain committed to the other 99% of the population: “those with proven buying power.”¹¹⁷ Other cosmetics company’s like Revlon began tentatively, if not openly, acknowledging women’s increasing call for political, economic, and social independence, but Avon continued using its “Avon Calling!” theme throughout the 1960s.

White, suburban housewives had emerged as the source of Avon’s expansive growth in the 1950s and the 1960s and secured a place for the Avon Lady in suburban living rooms, public school classrooms, and popular culture as the chimes of “Ding Dong! Avon Calling” announced Avon’s arrival as one of the United States leading cosmetics companies. By promoting itself as an extension of America’s free market economy and spirit of individual entrepreneurialism, Avon’s at-home selling system served as social cue, calling card, and an opportunity for over women 300,000 in the United States to “own her own business” without having to abandon their primary responsibilities as mothers and wives. Avon managed its representatives through its weekly sales meetings, representative newsletters, and beauty clinics for its mobile sales forces. Armed with Avon’s step-by-step training programs, Avon Ladies delivered a democratic version of beauty to women in the privacy in their homes. Beauty was no longer a privilege afforded to a select few but something every woman could achieve with Avon’s brochures and the assistance of their Avon Lady. Avon’s democratic version of beauty was supported by the public image that aligned at-home selling as a service to a new suburban lifestyle where consumption was both

¹¹⁶ “Someone Like Me” by George Shine, *Avon Essence*, Jan 1968.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

patriotic and reflected the American way of life. Now that Avon had successfully called enlisted American women to support its cause, its senior executives turned their attention to the rest of the world. With U.S.-nationalist discourse undergirding its corporate persona, organizational culture, and recruitment efforts, could Avon's distinctly "American" version of at-home selling be successfully exported, and if so, where? To answer these questions, the following chapter explores the ideologies and transnational practices that helped Avon recruit, motivate, and manage its first team of transnational beauty ambassadors in Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s.

While all of you know that Avon Cosmetics are out of this world, and Avon is sold the world over, it is not Management's intention at this moment to open branches in Outer Space. Yet Avon is moving apace everywhere...anyone for the Moon?

George Shine, Avon Vice President of Advertising and Marketing, 1964¹¹⁸

Chapter 2: Building a Transnational Army: Avon's Early Forays in Latin America, 1954-1973

In 1964, thousands of women across the United States received a brochure declaring that Avon had won the space race and landed on the moon. The promotional mailing tapped into America's increasing collective obsession with the space race, but also Avon's desire to expand the geographic and spatial boundaries of its sales markets. As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1950s and 1960s brought an era of unprecedented growth and profit for Avon as its stock increased 19,000% during the United States post war economic boom.¹¹⁹ It was also an era in which Avon executives actively and aggressively sought new markets outside the United States. In 1954 Avon launched its first significant export market in Puerto Rico. By 1972, Avon operated 18 subsidiaries on five continents, generating over a billion dollars in revenue.¹²⁰ How did this happen? What were the cultural processes that facilitated Avon's ventures outside the United States in the early 1950s? Most importantly, how did Avon broker the cultural appeal of its unique at home selling system?

To answer these questions this chapter analyzes Avon's earliest forays outside of the United States. Rather than providing a unified history of this expansion, I trace the myriad of transnational connectivities that emerge in the discourses of these early ventures, a method

¹¹⁸ "Avon Calling on the Moon Mailer, 1964," Series 1, Administration, Box 111.

¹¹⁹ Marilyn Bender, "Avon Chiming True." *New York Times*. 28 November, 1971.

¹²⁰ "1973 Annual Report," Series I: Administration, Subseries A: Annual Reports 1941-1996, Box 1.

developed by anthropologist Ulf Hannerz and expanded by Inderpal Grewal.¹²¹ Rather than focus on the enormous economies of scale that existed in Latin America's underdeveloped beauty and personal care industry, I argue that Avon's success hinged on its ability to recruit and motivate a transnational team of beauty ambassadors to sell and deliver its wares. Avon began its first international operation in 1914 when it began manufacturing and distributing its products in Canada, but it was not until 1954 when Avon expanded its operations outside the North America in Puerto Rico. Between 1954 and 1958, Avon began operations in Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico. Avon also began operations in the United Kingdom and Western Europe during the late 1950s, but I focus on Avon's first four ventures in Latin and South America to better isolate the regional and political context of its expansion. Like Grewal and Hannerz, I use transnationalism as a theoretical framework and trace the transnational connections between Avon's corporate office in the United States and the managers, employees, and women "on the ground" who helped facilitate the Avon Lady's transition from her iconic home in U.S. suburbia to Latin and South America.

My approach to studying Avon's global expansion does not center around the "firm" as an organizing concept like many international business historians, nor does it focus exclusively on the decentralized, flexible nature of direct selling's distribution system.¹²² My interest in

¹²¹ For example, in *Transnational America* Inderpal Grewal expands Hannerz's concept of transnational connections in conjunction with feminist and migration theory and uses the term "connectivities" to emphasize its diverse multiplicities to trace the trajectories and discourses of gender, consumerism, and ethnicity that create "transnational neoliberal subjects." As discussed in Chapter 1, Avon's ability to expand internationally resulted in part because of the revenue it generated from U.S. military contracts during World War II. As a result, its early international forays can be considered an extension, or at least a consequence, of the United States political and economic power following World War II. See Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America* and Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge, 1996.

¹²² Harvard business historian Geoffrey Jones has been especially helpful in helping me contextualize the larger economic forces and organizing structures that have shaped Avon's international expansion. See Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, C.1945-C.1980" *Economic History Review* 61, no. 1 (2008): 125-54. Ara Wilson's exploration on the ways global economic processes have shaped and been interpreted women's individual identities as direct sales distributors, including Avon representatives, has also been helpful. See Wilson,

globalization lies within the cultural processes U.S. companies have enlisted to make themselves meaningful and desirable outside the United States, and follows John Tomlinson's argument that culture not only matters for globalization but actually constitutes the process of "complex connectivity itself."¹²³ In its early international ventures Avon learned to make itself meaningful for women who had often never heard of the concept of direct selling or the products and Avon encouraged them to sell and use. Tomlinson suggests that modern institutions, including multinational firms, are reflexive and responsive. This challenges the notion that globalization is a one-way process dominated by macro political, economic, and technological structures and suggests that, even when driven by multinational firms, globalization leaves room for local intervention and flexibility.¹²⁴ Like any social organization, Avon is not abstract or divorced from the human beings who give it meaning, planned for its expansion, or facilitated its growth. Avon's reliance women's personal connections provides a unique opportunity to analyze its reflexivity as it sought to make Avon a meaningful form of work -and beauty brand –for women around the world.

The first section of this chapter examines Avon's rationale and motivations for beginning its international operations in Latin and South America, as well as the gendered training and ideologies Avon instilled in its male international General Managers, many of whom pioneered the concept of direct-selling in their Latin American markets. The second section analyzes the diasporic communities in Mexico and the United States that provided the human capital for Avon's start-up operations and the insider cultural knowledge of Avon's Latin female zone

Wilson, Ara, "The Empire of Direct Sales and the Making of Thai Entrepreneurs." *Critique of Anthropology* 19 (1999): 401-22. For a discussion and overview of globalization and the new international division of labor, see Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy : Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean*, (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000), 24-30.

¹²³ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 24.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26

managers who helped Avon executives navigate the gendered social and cultural conventions in their new markets. The last section analyzes the management techniques Avon disseminated through its representative newsletter, *Panorama*, and Avon's early attempts to develop a transnational corporate history to unite its geographically, ethnically, and nationally diverse team of beauty ambassadors.

Training for a Transnational Mission

Industry giant Proctor and Gamble and Colgate-Palmolive led U.S. companies in their quest to seek new export markets during the 1920s and 1930s, along with the United Kingdom/Netherland's Unilever Company.¹²⁵ Max Factor followed soon after by exporting its line of Hollywood color cosmetics in 1927, and Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubenstein competed for women's business in Western Europe after World War I. By 1947, Pond's sold its world famous face cream in 119 countries, Unilever sold its goods on five continents, and international consumption of mass produced beauty and hygiene products had emerged as a lucrative, global business.¹²⁶

Avon was also one of the earliest U.S. cosmetics companies to aggressively pursue consumers outside the United States beginning in the early 1950s. Profits from lucrative wartime contracts and the United States booming cosmetics industry provided Avon capital for its startup operations, and Avon opened its first operation outside the continent of North America in Puerto Rico during 1954. In 1958, Avon's Mexico operation became the first subsidiary to

¹²⁵ Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, C. 1945-1980." *Economic History Review* 61, no. 1 (2008): 129.

¹²⁶ According to Geoffrey Jones, in 1950, Colgate-Palmolive ranked as the world's largest personal care company with revenues generated by its export market at 58 million dollars. Unilever followed with 48 million dollars in export sales. See Geoffrey Jones "Blonde and Blue-Eyed?," 129-130. Also see Kathy Peiss, "Educating the Eye of the Beholder: American Cosmetics Abroad." *Daedalus* 131 (2002), 103.

manufacture its products locally.¹²⁷ Unlike Helena Rubenstein and Elizabeth Arden whose early international ventures began in Western Europe where European women's beauty practices more closely mirrored those in the U.S., Avon's early operations began in Latin America, a surprising choice given the significant investment many U.S. companies made in Western Europe after World War II.¹²⁸

Avon's rationale for beginning its export market in Latin America can in part be traced to the complex economic and political history between the United States and Latin America. Thomas O'Brien's argues that U.S. companies who pioneered the mass production of consumer goods and promoted consumption as America's new democratic ethos during the 1890s adopted similar strategies when they set their sights on export markets in Latin America:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, American culture had achieved a unique integration of the second industrial revolution's new scientific technology and rationalization of work relations with values that promoted individual achievement, a consumer society, an openness to perpetual change, and a vision of unrepenting improvement in the human condition. American business leaders set themselves on the task of spreading this culture overseas. Latin American became the principal target of these early efforts, given the region's proximity and longstanding commercial linkages to the United States.¹²⁹

When Avon began identifying possible export markets at the conclusion of World War II, the United States government had shifted its foreign policy attention to Western Europe to contain the advance of Communism, leaving many of Latin America's struggling economies to

¹²⁷ Avon opened its first European subsidiaries in West Germany and England during 1959, as well as one in Brazil during 1959. The combined population of these three subsidiaries totaled (and actually exceeded) the population of consumers in the United States. See *Avon Direct Line*, April 1958.

¹²⁸ For an extended survey of the marketing of U.S. consumer products in Western Europe after World War II, see Victoria De Grazia's *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹²⁹ O'Brien also notes that Latin Americans mixed receptions to U.S. commercial influence in the early twentieth century served as a testing ground and a precursor for the complicated relationship U.S. companies would face as they increased commercial and cultural exports around the world later in the twentieth century. Thomas F. O'Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945*, Cambridge Latin American Studies.(Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3-4.

seek aid from private U.S. companies. U.S. economic relationships varied with individual countries, especially with Panama, a country with a history of U.S. intervention that centered on the building, control, and eventual relinquishment of the Panama Canal.¹³⁰ In 1947, despite the anti-American riots that erupted in Panama to protest the United States extended military presence, Avon formed a joint venture to capitalize on the corporate tax breaks Panama offered.¹³¹

Shortly thereafter, using the profits it generated in Panama, Avon financed its first wholly owned subsidiary in Puerto Rico. After decades of failed efforts to rebuild Puerto Rico's economy, in the 1950s the U.S. government and Puerto Rico's civil government implemented "Operation Bootstrap," an extension of FDR's New Deal philosophy designed modernize Puerto Rico's agrarian economy. Key to this program included attracting private U.S. investors to the island. From 1947 to the mid 1960s, U.S. and Puerto Rican government wooed a number of U.S. corporations to the island by exempting their subsidiaries from taxes in both countries. The U.S. financial press proclaimed Puerto Rico a "taxpayer's paradise," a financial reward that when coupled with cheap labor costs, resulted in a boon of U.S. investment on the island until the mid 1960s.¹³² While the discretionary incomes of Puerto Ricans did not provide an ideal middle class customer base for Avon, tax breaks and the desire to create a base for future Latin

¹³⁰ For more information on Panama/U.S. relations and Panama civilian protests against U.S. military policies, see Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective*. Updated Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 81.

¹³¹ Avon announced its joint venture in Panama in its 1954 Annual Report, but is not mentioned again until a session about international tax laws during its 1974 Avon World Managers Conference. See "World-Wide Tax Planning" by J.F.Kehoe in Avon World Management Planning Conference, RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, Box 4.

¹³² For more information on the specifics of tax loopholes in the U.S. Internal Revenue Service' tax code and legislative efforts passed by the Puerto Rican government in 1947, see James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*. Princeton, (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 209. He notes that while U.S. company's were primarily interested in Puerto Rico for its tax exemption status, the differential in labor costs also played role in their decision to invest in the island as gaps between U.S. and Puerto Rican's hourly wages grew significantly between the 1950s and the 1970s.

American ventures provided enough incentive for Avon to launch its first large scale operation outside North America in 1954.¹³³

During the 1950s, most U.S. cosmetics companies operating outside the U.S. distributed their products through retail outlets and newly burgeoning department stores and relied primarily on print advertisements to advertise their wares.¹³⁴ Exporting Avon's direct sales method required different strategies in addition to the persuasive power of mass advertising. First and foremost, Avon had to find local governments hospitable to the idea of direct selling. Next, Avon executives were faced with the challenge of introducing and educating consumers about the legitimacy, efficiency, and benefits of at-home sales. Despite these hurdles, Harold Nadieau, Avon's Vice President and General Manager in South America, reminded Avon's international General Managers of its unique advantages at Avon's first international management conference: "The fact that ours is such a different business enables us to a greater extent than most other companies to superimpose our techniques and methods in all markets."¹³⁵ Once the initial hurdles of locating countries where direct-selling was legally feasible, when properly executed, Avon's direct sales system provided a structured, yet flexible way to generate demand for Avon

¹³³ Avon's largest hurdle was finding countries hospitable to direct selling but the company also had to account for manufacturing and operational costs. On average, Avon's early subsidiaries took about two years to open. See *Avon Essence*, May 1967.

¹³⁴ A number of historians have documented the influential role international subsidiaries of U.S.-owned advertising agencies played in creating and circulating images of feminine beauty and gender ideologies for consumers in Latin America. For an analysis of beauty advertisements and tie-ins in Mexico, see Julio Moreno's *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950*, The Luther Hartwell Hodges Series on Business, Society, and the State. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Jennifer Scanlon discusses the history of the J. Walter Advertising Company in Argentina in her article, "Mediators in the International Marketplace," *Business History Review* 77 (2003): 387-415. Joanne Hershfield examines Hollywood tie-ins and advertising and its influence on constructing "modern" Mexican women in *Imagining La Chica Modern: Women, Nation, and Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹³⁵ "Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau," Avon International Division: General Manager's Conference, 1963," RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69.

on an intimate, one-on-one level while also educating Latin American women on U.S grooming and beauty trends.

The task of implementing Avon's direct sales system outside the United States fell on the masculine shoulders of Avon's General Managers who managed its international subsidiaries. Many of these men pioneered direct selling in Avon's early Latin American subsidiaries and represented a new generation of businessmen U.S. companies increasingly relied on to operate as liaisons between their international operations and their corporate headquarters in the United States.¹³⁶ These elite, U.S. expatriate executives were members of what sociologist Leslie Sklair describes as the transnational professional class, whose interactions outside the United States literally facilitate the movement of capital, technology, and culture around the world.¹³⁷ They also represented what R.W. Connell describes as a specific brand of transnational business masculinity where white men from first world countries managed, oversaw, and drove U.S. and other Western nation's expansion in parts of the developing world.¹³⁸

The most important aspect of a GMs job began before he left the United States. Before moving abroad, or returning home, Avon trained its GMs in the United States, a process that inoculated them with the "spirit and philosophy of Avon" they could instill in their new employees and representatives.¹³⁹ Nicole Biggart Woolsey notes that direct selling organizations often embrace U.S. political values of equality, freedom, and faith in free enterprise as a central feature of their ideology in all levels of their recruitment and training.¹⁴⁰ The "spirit and

¹³⁶ A 1963 article in U.S. News and World Report underscored the expanded need and responsibilities this new generation of U.S. expatriate played on the world market." Cited in Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau," Avon International Division: General Manager's Conference, 1963," RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69..

¹³⁷ Leslie Sklair. *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. (Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 70.

¹³⁸ R.W Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-59.

¹³⁹ Letter from Harold D. Nadieau in *Avon Direct Line*, April 1958.

¹⁴⁰ Biggart-Woolsey, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 104-108.

philosophy” that drove Avon’s early expansion also reflects what Emily Rosenberg calls “liberal developmentalism,” an ideology marked by the idea that other nations should replicate U.S. economic development; share its faith in free enterprise; and promote the exchange of trade and investment.¹⁴¹ This sentiment rang especially true when it came to the business of selling hygiene and beauty products outside the United States, an enterprise that often relied upon a combination of private U.S. firms, state-sponsored trade agreements, local governments, and U.S. non-for profit organizations.¹⁴² From its first venture outside the United States, Avon executives aspired to sell Avon products to “...every home in the Free World,” and framed its recruitment efforts and beauty advice within U.S. discourses of democratic uplift and equality.¹⁴³ Like the Cold War rhetoric Avon deployed in the United States during the 1950s, Avon executives espoused a similar rhetoric in their early international ventures, as Nadieau explained, “There is not a country where Avon operates that we cannot walk without our heads high.....because you have taken an American ideal and made it into a Brazilian ideal, a Mexican ideal, and so on in each country.”¹⁴⁴

Cultivating a team spirit and corporate zeal that crossed national borders was critical to Avon’s international management training programs. This process began by instilling these ideals in Avon’s international GMs, who were expected to inspire their staff and ultimately the local women who became Avon’s first transnational beauty ambassadors. Avon saw its International GMs as paternal guardians who were responsible for fostering and maintaining

¹⁴¹ For example, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) and Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home*.

¹⁴² See for example, Steven Palmer, "Central American Encounters with Rockefeller Public Health, 1914-1921." In *Close Encounters: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. -Latin American Relations*, edited by Catherine Legrand Gilbert M. Joseph, Ricardo Salvatore, 311-32. (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

¹⁴³ The democratic ethos Avon infused the beauty advice and grooming techniques in its early Latin American subsidiaries will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ “Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau,” Avon International Division: General Manager’s Conference, 1963,” 6.

Avon's transnational family spirit. During their first codified training conference, Avon's Vice President of South and Latin American operations, Henry Nadieau, emphasized GMs obligation and jobs as "...father confessors, watchful guardians, and Dutch Uncles" to their American employees working in Avon's international branches.¹⁴⁵ He also encouraged GMs to organize social functions for Avon employees, most likely with the help of their wives, and to be sensitive to the challenges U.S. employees faced when moving abroad. As Avon's highest ranking ambassador outside the United States, General Managers were expected to embody and represent Avon's highest and most honorable characteristics, while also taking care to hire staff that did not "... damage Avon's character."¹⁴⁶ Nadieau wanted GMs to engage in "mutual understanding" with local populations while also using this positive relationship to identify future [male] managers for Avon's growing international division.

In between this message of cultural exchange and mutual respect, Nadieau reiterated the sense of purpose and spirit of economic uplift that guided Avon's international ventures. He reminded GMs of the founding principles of Avon's founder, David McConnell, who felt Avon was one of the few business endeavors where men could both make money and enjoy the spiritual satisfaction of helping others:

Sometimes when we talk about the mechanics of our business...we forget that we are really contributors to the well-being and happiness of millions of people. I hope you never get so sophisticate and so blasé that you will not feel choked up when you hear the expressions of gratitude and thanks for the many good women who are Avon Representatives and whose lives have been made better because of the opportunity that we offer.¹⁴⁷

Naideau's desire to imbue general managers with a sense of purpose bigger than generating profits reflects one of direct-selling organization's primary means of humanizing their profit-

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 8.

oriented distribution systems.¹⁴⁸ In the 1950s, Avon sent British and U.S. expatriates who often had previous work or life experience to oversee the opening of their early Latin American operations.¹⁴⁹ Unlike many other cosmetics companies, once established, Avon expected its international General Managers (GMs) to be self-sufficient and conduct their operations relatively autonomous of Avon's corporate headquarters in New York. An ideal international GM was expected to speak multiple languages; possess good management skills; and engage firsthand in all aspects of Avon's operations.¹⁵⁰

Avon executives also used informal connections in the United States to spread word of its burgeoning interest in the global cosmetics market. Unlike the masculine sphere of Avon's corporate boardrooms and training conferences, these transnational connections often occurred in informal settings or during social events and relied on the social connections and/or expertise of its female executives, like Avon's first public relations director and New York socialite, Miss Anna J. Figsbee. In 1960, while entertaining the wives of United Nations delegates, Miss Figsbee arranged for the women to receive free Avon lipsticks, remarking, "They were all so delighted! I like to think of the lady from Bangkok and the ones from Madrid and other faraway places going back home with an Avon lipstick and showing it to their friends!"¹⁵¹ A few years later, Avon hosted the wives of United Nations dignitaries and provided tours of Avon's research facilities in Rye, New Jersey, where women received makeovers and beauty advice from Avon's beauty experts. A column in one of Avon's 1960 U.S. manager's newsletter summarized Avon's

¹⁴⁸ Biggart-Woolsey, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 3-9.

¹⁴⁹ When it opened its subsidiary in Australia, Avon placed classified advertisements for Australian and British expatriates living in the United States who wanted to return home. This policy would change a few years later as Avon preferred to hire local managers and employees. Its operations in Belgium proved to be the first international operation that was staffed entirely by Belgian nationals. See *Avon Direct Line*, May 1963.

¹⁵⁰ No author. "Avon International Division, General Manager's Conference, June 1963," RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69, 4.

¹⁵¹ "Avon...and the United Nations," *Avon Direct Line*, Feb. 1960.

interest in promoting goodwill to the global community by stating, “Communicating this spirit to our friends at home and abroad cannot but help us to greater success as Avon grows and becomes established in more world markets.”¹⁵² Through the codified training of its international General Managers and to a lesser degree, its social networks in the United States, Avon produced and exported a discourse of uplift, service and respectability that mimicked the one it crafted for itself in the United States.

Promoting this ideology of spirit of uplift and opportunity entailed a similar gendered division of labor. In addition to carrying forth Avon’s mantra of democratic uplift, Avon’s international GMs were expected to hire, advise, and monitor the female zone managers. As the paternal guardians of Avon’s transnational image, international GMs oversaw Avon’s operations and managed the female zone managers in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba. According to Avon’s corporate policy, GMs job qualifications centered upon his ability to motivate and manage women and his understanding of female psychology.¹⁵³ One executive likened these traits to the masculine leadership and prowess of an army general by stating, “Nevertheless, just as an army general must be interested in his front line soldiers, so must General Managers at Avon be interested in their Female field operations staff.”¹⁵⁴ Leading their female troops to battle meant GMs needed to hire female zone managers who could recruit the right Avon representatives for each territory. Introducing direct sales was more than a quest to sell lipsticks and perfumes to women in Latin America. It also required Avon to sell itself as a desirable form of work for women who had never heard of the concept of at-homes sales, Avon, or its products.

¹⁵² *Avon Direct Line*, July 1963.

¹⁵³ No Author. “Avon International Division: General Manager’s Conference, 1963,” RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69, 7.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

Building an Army of Avon Ladies

The process of locating Avon's first transnational beauty ambassadors began in the United States. Before opening its subsidiary in Mexico, for example, Avon solicited 800 names for potential recruits from representatives in the Southwest United States.¹⁵⁵ By relying on women's family and social networks that spanned U.S. and Mexico state borders, Avon's early international recruitment strategies illustrates another way transnational kinship and social networks link groups and communities across and between state borders.¹⁵⁶ Avon's reliance on its U.S. representatives' kinship and social networks as a labor source illustrates a type of "transnational connectivity," where Avon representatives in the United States helped provide the human capital Avon needed to begin operations in Mexico and underscores Avon's early international operations as a "ground up," transnational endeavor.

Drawing on contact information U.S. Avon representatives provided, Avon's corporate policy then encouraged international GMs to hire self-motivated, ambitious women who were well connected and respected in their local communities and knew the demographics of their neighborhoods. This combination of knowledge and motivation superseded whether or not a potential new female zone manager possessed any formal education. To find the right women for the job, Avon's international GMs hired and trained a small group of women in a major city of a given country, promoted the best female candidate to zone manager, and repeated the process in another city.¹⁵⁷ From this point forward, Avon's Latin American female zone managers relied on a combination of personal connections and classified advertisements to

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁵⁷ For example, Avon's Australian national sales manager hired twelve women in Sydney to serve as sales managers, promoted the best to the salaried position of sales manager, and then repeated the process in Melbourne. A similar process occurred in Mexico, where Avon began in Mexico City and then moved their operations to Monterrey. See *Avon Direct Line*, August 1963.

recruit Avon representatives for their zones. As one male executive in the United States described the process, “There you are, a new manager who never heard of Avon....There’ll be no one to get recommendations from, only your own sales ability from which to build.”¹⁵⁸ While there are limited demographic data on these early Latin American zone managers, in addition to being well-connected, ambitious women who enjoyed a challenge, Avon expected them to have culturally-specific knowledge of the people residing in their territory; i.e., whether multiple languages were spoken; religious and ethnic differences; and other context-specific cultural norms that shaped women’s attitudes about cosmetics usage.¹⁵⁹ Despite the cultural blinders that prevented many of Avon’s male executives from recognizing diversity in their United States market during the 1950s and early 1960s, Henry Nadieau reminded international GMs of the important role female zone managers played in navigating the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences in Avon’s international markets. They also helped Avon’s male executives navigate cultural norms about Latin American women’s domestic responsibilities, their families, and the impact these differences had on their purchasing decisions or desire to sell Avon.¹⁶⁰ Without the insider knowledge of these early zone managers, Avon would not possess the cultural knowledge, social networks, or human labor it needed to expand outside the United States. Recruiting women to sell Avon hinged upon a specific form of feminized labor carried out by

¹⁵⁸ *Avon Direct Line*, May 1963.

¹⁵⁹ No Author. “Avon International Division: General Manager’s Conference, 1963,” RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69.

¹⁶⁰ Business historian Thomas Cochran’s ethnographic case study of Puerto Rican businessmen in 1950s shows that while the majority of Puerto Rico businessmen who worked with U.S. companies often came from established Spanish families eager to attract U.S. investors, they often eyed U.S. expatriate managers and salesmen with suspicion or disdain, relying instead on long-standing social and kinship networks when making major business decisions. Cochran notes that Spanish colonial customs often meant protecting Puerto Rican women from the influence foreigners, a custom that also applied to U.S. expatriates living in Puerto Rico. See Thomas Cochran, *The Puerto Rican Businessman; a Study in Cultural Change*. (Philadelphia,: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), 142.

Avon's Latin American female zone managers and mirrored the gendered management practices Avon developed in the United States.

Feminist scholars have illustrated the ways in which globalization has refashioned people's gendered identities, work relations, consumption habits, family structures, and migration patterns.¹⁶¹ Carla Freeman notes that globalization has often been discussed as a socio-economic phenomena marked by men's mobility while women's work has been bound by static, "feminized" domestic, industrial or agricultural labor. Freeman criticizes these binary categories, and notes that by studying local dynamics of globalization, we can begin to see the multiple ways gendered bodies and identities facilitate flows of global capital, services, and culture.¹⁶² Even though Freeman frames her argument within a discourse of globalization rather than transnationalism, she highlights the complex and competing gendered ideologies that shaped Avon's international ventures. Avon's expansion in its early Latin American markets was neither a purely "masculine" nor a "feminine" enterprise, but hinged upon a gendered division of labor and management practices developed and exported from the United States.

Avon's male managers in Latin American subsidiaries were instructed to view themselves as Avon's paternal guardians who bore the responsibility of hiring women who fit Avon's carefully crafted corporate image. To safeguard and cultivate its new international image, Avon purposely recruited women whose image reinforced the values Avon executives and its public affairs office cultivated in the United States. Avon's senior leaders in the United States made it clear that international GMs should hire female managers who were well groomed

¹⁶¹ Avon sales managers worked in their city or rural neighborhoods and recruited Avon representatives using similar same social networks that provide the labor for U.S. direct sales operations that Nicole Woolsey Biggart documents in *Charismatic Capitalism*.

¹⁶² Carla Freeman, "Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1007-1037.

and had “personal [lives] beyond attack.”¹⁶³ Executives estimated each of international female zone managers interacted with approximately 100,000 people in her territory.¹⁶⁴ In addition to her cultural knowledge and social networks, Avon explicitly sought out women whose moral virtue, respectability, and commitment to home and family life mirrored Avon’s corporate values.

Avon launched extensive advertising campaigns in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba utilizing a range of television, newspaper, and movie trailers to reinforce its feminine image of middle class respectability. Advertisements touted direct selling as a service tailored to the lifestyle and values of upper middle class women. The Latin American Avon Lady was a fair skinned, Spanish speaking version of her U.S. counterpart. She explained the convenience of shopping at home while the camera panned over images of Avon Ladies seated in formal living rooms with well-behaved, fair-skinned children watch nearby. This image of suburban tranquility Avon constructed may have only spoken to a limited number of upper class women in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico. Yet if women in Avon’s early Latin American subsidiaries did not have a TV, Avon ran print advertisements in leading newspapers and magazines with taglines like, “The Most Elegant Women in Mexico Choose Avon Cosmetics at Home.” The ads in each subsidiary described Avon as an exclusive beauty brand that served “ladies” of Latin America.¹⁶⁵

By the time Avon produced its “Avon Llama” television advertisements in 1955, local economic and political conditions had challenged women’s confinement to home and hearth. As a number of Latin American historians have shown, normative social expectations that shaped

¹⁶³ “Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau,” Avon International Division: General Manager’s Conference, 1963,” 6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁶⁵ Avon Print Ad, Mexico, 1958; *Avon Direct Line*, May 1957

women's identities in Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico transitioned amid a flurry of economic modernization projects and political upheavals during this period.¹⁶⁶ Avon never explicitly addressed these cultural conflicts of interest by actively encouraging women leave their homes to sell its wares. As discussed in Chapter 1, Avon relied on women to see themselves as domestic safeguards for their family's health and hygiene. It never presented itself as a form of libratory emancipation from a woman's domestic responsibilities. Instead, Avon it promoted itself as a domestic service rather than a "job" that required women to abandon their domestic responsibilities. While individual and collective receptions of Avon's version of suburban living undoubtedly varied by women in different geographic locations and class backgrounds, Avon's Latin American print and television advertisements reiterated the same basic theme of domestic living and gendered consumption: the Latin American Avon Lady was a modern woman who served modern households. Avon Lady's offered unique service that provided families "world famous" and innovative products. As one Avon advertisement in a Mexican magazine explained, "Without leaving home, today you can buy the most famous cosmetics in the world...Avon." Inviting the Avon Lady into one's home was framed as a natural extension of Avon's longstanding commitment to "service" women's desire to be beautiful and modern.¹⁶⁷

Motivating and Training Avon's Transnational Beauty Ambassadors

Once women agreed to become Avon representatives, they were appointed a territory, and received training, catalogs, and samples like their U.S. counterparts. From this point

¹⁶⁶ For a discussion of changing social roles and identities of women in Mexico, see Joanne Herschfield's *Imagining La Chica Modern: Women, Nation, and Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*; Iija Luciak, *Gender and Democracy in Cuba*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida); Craig Clunas, "Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West." *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 5 (1999): 1497-511.

¹⁶⁷ The prescriptive behaviors, classed, and racial meanings Avon linked to its products and services will be explored in Chapter 3.

forward, Avon relied upon its Latin American representative newsletter, *Panorama*, to educate representatives on product information. While they shared the same title, each subsidiary circulated their own version of the representative newsletter that corresponded to sales campaigns and products for that particular country. As a transnational management tool, Avon's Latin American *Panoramas* were designed to motivate and manage its new Latin America representatives. Avon relied on female copywriters to generate its Spanish-language representative newsletters in Latin America and to remind representatives of their responsibility to serve other women and the privilege of working for the world's most famous cosmetics company.¹⁶⁸ Back in New York, Avon's Latin American Editorial Division included a number of female employees who were responsible for the layout, content, and beauty advice to train Avon's novice sales representatives in the art of at-homes sales.¹⁶⁹ The first *Panorama* was designed, produced, and shipped from Avon's headquarters in New York to Puerto Rico in 1954. Early Puerto Rican *Panoramas* contained few photographs, minimal illustrations, and rudimentary drawings. However, when Avon began operations in Venezuela a few months later, its *Panoramas* featured photographs. A year later, in Cuba, editors presented a distinct brand of cosmopolitan beauty culture and glamour for Havana's sophisticated beauty culture.¹⁷⁰ Employees at Avon's Mexico subsidiary were the first to develop the editorial content for their *Panoramas*, rather than having it shipped from the U.S. Not surprisingly, its first edition focused

¹⁶⁸ J. Walter Thompson also relied on women to create advertisements and copy for its international cosmetics advertisements. See Denise Sutton, *Globalizing Modern Beauty: The Women's Editorial Department at the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Company, 1910-1945*. PhD Dissertation. Clark University, 2004. For a discussion of women in the United States who worked on J. Walter Thompson's accounts see Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁶⁹ For example, Miss. Myriam DeBoudout was promoted to Associate Editor of Avon's Latin American Division in 1957 and was responsible for compiling and editing *Panorama* (the newsletter for representatives), sales brochures, and promotional material. See *Avon Direct Line*, August 1957.

¹⁷⁰ This could partially be attributed to the fact that the collection of Cuban *Panorama*'s in Avon's archival collection does not start until 1958, three years after the beginning of its operation. Even so, in 1958, Avon offered many of the same toiletry and beauty products as it did in Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

exclusively on the explaining the benefits of direct selling and the rewards Mexican women could earn selling Avon.¹⁷¹

Panoramas promoted the labor of selling Avon as an opportunity for women to earn money, make friends, and achieve their dreams. Whether or not Avon's Latin American representatives earned enough money to make their financial dreams come true is hard to ascertain; however, it is clear that Avon's Latin American editors, many of whom were women, relied on the same overarching motivational themes that Avon developed for representatives in the United States.¹⁷² For example, in Venezuela, Avon encouraged representatives to think of the extra money they earned as a contribution to their family's happiness and material well-being:

The most precious and happy moments are the one shared with loved ones...to provide what they want, to see their reactions of surprise and joy upon receiving much desired objects. ..this toy you heard about so many times....is one of the most cherished desires of every human being. And the best way to acquire all these things is working with Avon.¹⁷³

Avon illustrated this vision of domestic happiness with photographs of young children playing with trains and dolls; a father enjoying the time saving efficiency of an electric razor; and a mother's excitement of serving refreshments in her new set of tumblers. Much like the "Fables of Abundance" Jackson Lears identifies as a marketing trope in early U.S. advertisements that promoted the New World, and later the United States, as a land of material abundance and opportunity, Avon marketed its own version of material abundance for its Latin American Representatives, a process devoid of references to U.S. nationalist symbols or an explicitly

¹⁷¹ Avon's Mexican subsidiary was the first operation to manufacture all of its products in local manufacturing plants using local ingredients, which Avon proudly proclaimed helped improve the Mexican economy. See *Avon Direct Line*, May 1957.

¹⁷² Unfortunately none of these early Latin American *Panoramas* include demographic data on representatives earning potential, or income.

¹⁷³ *Panorama*, Venezuela, Campaign no 3, 1955. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 105.

“American” history of the self-made man.¹⁷⁴ It still relied on direct-selling’s organizational strategy of what Nicole Biggart Woolsey describes as “...creating and legitimizing desire for material wealth” and presented modernity as something a woman could achieve by selling and consuming Avon’s beauty products.¹⁷⁵ This message was not bound to a singular national history or mythology but presented all women as potential entrepreneurs whose efforts were rewarded with household goods Avon framed as desirable, essential, and achievable.

Avon encouraged its Latin American representatives to see themselves as entrepreneurs but rewarded them as consumers. For example, early Latin American *Panoramas* repeatedly reminded representatives that they could make their individual material dreams come true, as long as they worked hard and believed in themselves: “We have security knowing that all the women who join a new company have their own dreams they want to convert to reality. And all their dreams can be true if they propose them with their hearts and work with effort.”¹⁷⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, Avon employed similar appeals in the U.S., but when deployed in Latin America, its mantra of conspicuous consumption was positioned as a modernization project where women’s efforts served her entire family.

Avon exported many of its other emotional motivational and management strategies to Latin America. To cultivate a spirit of teamwork while also singling out individual achievement within the group, Avon introduced a merit badge for high earning representatives similar to the one it used in the United States. As an early Puerto Rican *Panorama* described, receiving Avon’s Broche was an honor that typified the “thousands and thousands” of women. According

¹⁷⁴ See T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance : A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

¹⁷⁵ Woolsey-Biggart, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 105.

¹⁷⁶ Venezuela Panorama, Campaign #1, 1954. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 105

to Avon, the broach symbolized an individual representatives' commitment to excellence and epitomized the values and work ethic of the ideal Avon Lady. Just like the sales catalogs and the samples Avon Ladies carried with them on their house calls, the broche was intended to visually signify superior service from a reputable company and a woman's elite status within Avon. As one Puerto Rico *Panorama* described it:

When they see the broach on your chest they think, "This a representative I like because of her courtesy; her attention; her punctuality; and her skill as a seller- the Broach bears proof of these great qualities – she helps me select cosmetics and other articles for me and my family."¹⁷⁷

It also used *Panorama* to solicit recommendations from existing representatives, guising its need for additional labor within rhetoric of service and friendship. Articles encouraged representatives to be "true friends" and share the opportunities and good fortune Avon afforded them while also reminding them of the three dollars they could earn from each successful appointment.¹⁷⁸ A discourse of friendship and sharing emerged in each of its subsidiaries. In the first Venezuelan *Panorama* in 1955, for example, editors included a "New Creed" for representatives that were "more than words from the heart; they were words that inspired many women to achieve success." *Panorama* reminded representatives to be friendly, to cultivate long lasting friendships with their customers, and most importantly, to read their *Panoramas* to help their customers meet their individual beauty potential.¹⁷⁹

A few months after each subsidiary opened, *Panorama* began including representative testimonials similar to those utilized in the United States. The formal portrait photographs that accompanied representatives' written testimonials offer brief visual evidence of what some early

¹⁷⁷ *Panorama*, Puerto Rico, Campaign #5, 1954. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 96.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *Panorama*, Venezuela, Campaign#3, 1954. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 105.

Latin American Avon Lady's looked like during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most bear little resemblance to the fair-skinned, elegantly dressed Avon Ladies who appeared in Avon's Latin American print and television advertisements. Their dark hair, eyes, and modest housedresses indicate a social background marked less by pearls and hats and more by the practical fashion sensibilities of middle class mothers and housewives from mestizo populations. Like the representative testimonials printed in United States *Outlooks*, the pages of *Panorama* are one of the few places where the words of early Latin and South American representatives are present. However, their testimonies offer a potentially misleading view of since Avon's U.S. *Outlook* and its Latin American *Panorama* were strategic marketing tools designed to motivate and manage representatives' individual sales efforts.

Representative testimonials in early Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, Cuban, and Mexican *Panoramas* reiterate slight variations of the same themes and repeatedly attribute their success to following Avon's recommended sale strategies, regularly reading their *Panoramas*, and calling on homes frequently. In one 1958 Cuban *Panorama*, a representative discussed the benefits of Avon's new rewards program by stating, "The Rewards Program has a double interest for me; it gives me enthusiasm to work and achieve more and at the same time, to receive a precious gift."

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Avon also crafted a transnational corporate history to span national borders, cultural differences, and language barriers. Beginning with its first international Puerto Rican *Panorama*, Avon created a corporate history that borrowed heavily from U.S. notions of uplift and opportunity but never explicitly linked itself to the United States nor invoked the familiar

¹⁸⁰ *Panorama, Cuba*, Campaign #14, 1958. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 82.

tropes that frequently associated with the American Dream.”¹⁸¹ Early *Panoramas* informed new representatives of Avon founder David McConnell’s vision to serve the needs of women in the comfort of their homes; Avon’s unconditional guarantee; and its spirit of opportunity. The most pervasive theme in Avon’s early Latin American *Panoramas* emphasized the democratic spirit and uplift of selling. Avon reminded new representatives they were not only selling products; they belonged to an organization that provided women a much needed service. Avon framed its beauty ambassadors as members of an elite organization with a special mission: to provide quality goods, superior service, and genuine friendship to women. It was a call to action that transcended geographic and national borders. Regardless of their different backgrounds and motivations for selling Avon, crafting a collective corporate history and likening their labor to a spiritual and moral calling, Avon’s early *Panoramas* in Latin America united women in a common cause that downplayed representatives’ status as distributors who paid Avon for the opportunity to distribute its products.

Between 1954 and 1965 Avon’s recruitment strategies centered around promoting a shared sense of purpose and service that culminated in a discourse of democratic uplift that mimicked the one Avon developed in the United States. It also served as the primary means to motivate Avon’s transnational sales team of independent female sales agents. Avon successfully exported its at home selling system by framing itself as a way for women to help their families; realize their individual dreams; and to achieving a modern life that centered on selling and consuming Avon’s beauty products. Its management strategies transcended national and state borders by creating local representative newsletters that promoted Avon’s transnational corporate

¹⁸¹ See for example Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*.

history and mission. All of this was organized and managed by men who saw themselves and Avon as delivering modernity, uplift, and women's democratic right to sell, buy, and consume.

However, the real power driving Avon's international expansion of Avon's at-home selling system were local women Avon trained and managed. Unlike the female employees who collected market research and created international advertising campaigns for U.S. cosmetics companies, Avon's early Latin American representatives actively facilitated the transfer of Avon's Americanized beauty culture from the United States to "contact zones" in women's living rooms throughout Latin America. Their primary responsibility and any income they earned relied on their ability to disseminate and sell Avon's prescriptive hygiene and beauty advice. The following chapter explores the strategies Avon developed to transform these new Avon Ladies into authorities on modern grooming and hygiene practices Avon deemed essential to the health, well-being, and happiness of its expanding customer base in Latin America.

“If there is one cosmetic that speaks an international language, it is lipstick.”

- Miss Anna J. Figsbee, Director of Avon’s Public Relations, February 1960 ¹⁸²

Chapter 3: Delivering and Democratizing Beauty in Latin America, 1954 -1972

Avon’s male executives developed a transnational set of management, motivational, and training practices local women implemented in territories and neighborhoods throughout Latin America in the late 1950s and 1960s. “Avon Llama!” became an increasingly common sound on Latin American television commercials, while real life Avon Ladies knocked on the doors of their friends and neighbors. While we know Avon created a more or less unified system to recruit and motivate its new beauty ambassadors, what exactly were these women selling? To answer this question, this chapter explores the more localized, micro cultural practices Avon developed for its sales representatives to take with them on their sales calls. The representative newsletter *Panorama* advertised a lifestyle which Avon hoped its new representatives and their customers would aspire while also reminding them the benefits Avon’s at-home selling system delivered. *Panoramas* were one of the most powerful transnational practices that connected Avon’s geographically diverse sales force with Avon’s corporate mission and ideology. It was also instruction manual where we see evidence of the transnational flows, or disjunctures, to borrow Arjun Appadurai’s phrase, of Avon’s U.S.-based beauty and grooming ideologies and practices as they traveled to Latin America.¹⁸³ By analyzing and comparing the advice, images, and behaviors inside the pages of these early *Panoramas*, we can better understand the gendered, racial, and classed dimensions of Avon’s prescriptive beauty advice that it trained and

¹⁸² “Avon and the United Nations,” *Avon Direct Line*, February 1960.

¹⁸³ Appadurai sees globalization as a series of disjunctures – or differences – between the economy, culture and politics that produce global flows in overlapping ethno, finance, techno, media, and ideological “scapes.” Appadurai’s work illustrates the “disjunctive” relationship between nation-states and the flows of culture across borders that “.have fueled consumerism throughout the world and have increased the craving, even in the non-Western world for new commodities and spectacles.” See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large : Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Public Worlds ; V.1.* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996,) 106.

encouraged representatives to take with them on their sales calls. The first section analyzes how Avon's at-home selling system shifted the discourse of a newly globalized beauty discourse from the public sphere in mass advertising campaigns to the private homes of women. Key to this process were Avon's trained Latin American beauty experts who brought Avon's messages of modern hygiene, grooming and beauty habits, a topic discussed in the second section. The third section discusses educating customers through Avon's product demonstrations, brochures, and expert training which were designed to make beauty democratic and accessible for all women. It concludes by examining how Avon's Latin American representatives brokered the racial politics of selling beauty in Latin America.

Creating a Global Beauty Discourse

A number of scholars trace the creation and circulation of modern beauty discourse to the 1890s when mass production required European, UK, and U.S. cosmetics companies to identify new export markets. To aid this endeavor, cosmetics and toiletry companies relied on the aid of the burgeoning advertising industry. Advertising executives around the world made explicit their professional responsibility and moral obligation to generate demand for beauty and toiletry items and to bring "civilization" to homes around the world.¹⁸⁴ Armed with scientific methods, executives at international branches of U.S. advertising agencies recognized and at times, explicitly embraced the opportunity to change local hygiene practices, gender roles, and social customs. As one advertising executive explained, their job was to convince the world "...new

¹⁸⁴ See for example Chapter 5, "J. Walter Thompson's International Expansion: Globalizing the Women's Editorial Department," in Denise Sutton's "Globalizing Modern Beauty: The Women's Editorial Department at the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Company, 1910-1945," and Julio Moreno's *Yankee Don't Go Home*; and Jennifer Scanlon's, "Mediators in the Global Marketplace."

ways of doing old things.”¹⁸⁵ Just like their early marketing forays in the United States, companies like Pond’s, Elizabeth Arden, and Max Factor advertised their beauty products in popular women’s magazines and newspapers in campaigns often created by international subsidiaries of U.S. advertising agencies.¹⁸⁶ Some, like the London branch of the U.S.-based advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, hired women to conduct market research in Europe to help Pond’s, Elizabeth Arden, and Cutex refine their advertisements to the grooming habits and tastes of local women.¹⁸⁷ Though these women often answered to male managers in both U.S. and abroad, female copy writers at J. Walter Thompson played an active role in helping create a commercial beauty discourse in the United States and throughout the world.

By the late 1940s, aided by advancements in communication technology and a burgeoning Hollywood film studio system, a distinctly “Americanized” version female beauty, sex appeal, and glamour was increasingly exported around the world in screen, print, and television commercials.¹⁸⁸ Many U.S. cosmetics companies capitalized on Hollywood’s “glamour” through tie-in campaigns that featured studio starlets.¹⁸⁹ During 1940s and 1950s,

¹⁸⁵ A number of scholars provide case studies of international advertising agencies responsible for ushering in modern lifestyle marked by consumption, including promotion of mass produced beauty and toiletry items for U.S. and Western European companies. For a discussion of history of marketing toiletry items in Zimbabwe, see Timothy Burke’s *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe, Body, Commodity, Text*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, especially Chapter 5, “New Mission: Advertising and Market Research in Zimbabwe, 1945-1979;” and Chapter 5 in Denise Sutton’s *Globalizing Beauty Dissertation*. For specific discussions of U.S. advertising agencies operating in Latin and South America see Jennifer Scanlon’s, “Mediators in the international marketplace;” Joanne Herschfield’s *Imagining La Chica Modern: Women, Nation, and Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936*; and Julio Moreno’s *Yankee! Don’t Go Home!* For an ethnographic account of the transnational circulation of female beauty ideals from a non-Western perspective in feminine spaces such as beauty parlors, see Susan Ossman’s *Three Faces of Beauty: Casablanca, Paris, Cairo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ See Denise Sutton, *Globalizing Modern Beauty: The Women’s Editorial Department at the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Company, 1910-1945*; Kathy Peiss, “Educating the Eye of the Beholder: American Cosmetics Abroad.” *Daedalus* 131 (2002).

¹⁸⁷ Denise Sutton, *Globalizing Beauty*, 239; Peiss, “Educating the Eye of the Beholder,” 103.

¹⁸⁸ Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity.” In *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*, edited by Anthony King, 19-39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997, 27.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Gundle, Gundle, Stephen. “Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3 (2002): 95-118.

Max Factor relied on a transnational version of Hollywood sex appeal to market its international line of color cosmetics, a strategy that presented glamour as something universally desirable and achievable for all women, regardless of the miles that separated them from Hollywood, Paris, or other cosmopolitan centers of modernity. Other companies, like Pond's, continued to rely on testimonials from elite, aristocratic European women to link its vanishing crème with the lifestyle of refined, upper class femininity. As a number of scholars have shown, these early international advertising campaigns for many U.S. cosmetics companies often positioned themselves and their products as bringing beauty *to* women around the world rather than incorporating local beauty ideals. As a result, they helped lay the foundation for a discourse where modern feminine beauty was often articulated and represented in western, Euro-centric images.¹⁹⁰ Although these prescriptive and limited images were often developed in the USA for export abroad, by the 1950s, Hollywood's version of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauties and their seductive, raven-haired counterparts, were no longer the only images used in cosmetics advertisements in Latin America.¹⁹¹ As Geoffrey Jones research illustrates, U.S. firms faced competition from local and regional cosmetics companies' ability to articulate and connect with the hygiene and grooming practices of consumers outside the United States. To combat these challenges, U.S. cosmetics companies learned to adapt their advertising campaigns to desires of local women by utilizing local advertising agencies and celebrities.

¹⁹⁰ Julio Moreno notes that during this time, Pond's Tangee, Michels and Zande promoted their products within a discourse that located beauty in "chic" looks of Paris, Rio. U.S. Companies supported their advertising campaigns in non-visual mediums as well. For example, like beauty advice columns in U.S. magazines and newspapers, Mexican newspapers in the 1940s also regularly included beauty advice columns like *La Familia's* "Feminine Beauty" where Hollywood actresses Genny Simms and Loris Leeds advised Mexican women on their personal beauty dilemmas. Also see Kathy Peiss, "Educating the Eye of the Beholder;" Joanne Herschfield, *Imagining La Chica Moderna*; and Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue Eyed."

¹⁹¹ Geoffrey Jones, "Blond Haired, Blue-Eyed."

By the conclusion of World War II, Kathy Peiss notes:

Whatever the dominant image of American movie actresses, television star, and models at different times, even more important has been the ease of which U.S. corporations have mixed images of national types of beauty and femininity, choosing to accentuate certain representations of difference and to slight others. Thus, American manufacturers increasingly used an extensive, but incoherent iconography of the world's people to sell their products, adjusting them for specific national and local markets.¹⁹²

While U.S. cosmetics companies learned the importance of adapting their campaigns for individual markets, their increasing export activities helped produce a powerful discourse of female beauty that was firmly linked, and indeed contingent on visual imagery and emotional appeals that mirrored those developed in U.S. advertising campaigns. Mass produced cosmetics, creams, shampoos were presented, albeit in different languages, with different models and motifs, as cure-alls for women's individual and collective insecurities. Despite these local adaptations, advertisements still universally promoted the consumption of mass produced cosmetics and toiletry items as the key to achieving modern beauty.¹⁹³

By the time Avon began its international operations in late 1950s, local variations of a U.S.-centered globalized commercial beauty discourse had been circulating in Latin America for over half a century. As early as the 1890s, elite women in Puerto Rico began purchasing perfumes and cosmetics from European and U.S. companies. Women's fashion and beauty rituals throughout Latin and South America had been influenced by years of Spanish colonial rule, national independence movements; economic modernization projects; influxes of European

¹⁹² Peiss, "Educating the Eye of the Beholder," 107.

¹⁹³ For an overview of the international expansion of the beauty industry see Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde-Haired and Blue Eyed?" For discussion of the relationship between mass consumption of beauty and hygiene products and commercial advertising in the United States, see Kathy Peiss's *Hope in a Jar*; Juliann Sivulka's *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940.*, (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2001).

immigrants; and a number of other historically-contingent experiences.¹⁹⁴ When Avon began its operations in Puerto Rico in 1954, it did not revolutionize or even introduce new cosmetics or toiletry products to its Latin and South American subsidiaries. Like many cosmetics companies, the expanding influence of mass media helped Avon insert its at-home beauty service into these local beauty cultures. As discussed in the previous chapter, Avon's strategic advertising campaigns helped educate consumers about the merits and legitimacy of direct selling and represented Avon and its representatives as ambassadors who brought beauty to women in the comfort and convenience of their homes.

Avon's appeal and initial success in Latin America, like the United States, did not reside in the symbolic appeal and popularity of its "Avon Llama" advertisements that circulated in mass media outlets during the 1950s and 1960s, nor did it benefit from the increasing number of retail, drug, and department stores that many U.S. cosmetics companies used to distribute their wares. Avon's success instead stemmed from its ability to recruit local women as part of its first transnational team of beauty ambassadors. By relying on the social contacts of its new Latin American Avon Ladies Avon shifted the public business of representing and selling beauty from mass advertising campaigns and department store demonstrations to the private realm of women's homes. And, unlike the volatile political sphere where discussions of health, hygiene, and grooming often served as rationale for U.S. and local government programs aimed at "modernizing" many Latin American countries, Avon's representatives travelled from home to home, outside the official realm of politics. As Avon's first transnational beauty ambassadors,

¹⁹⁴ Dilia Lopez-Gydosh Dickinson and Marsha A. "'Every Girl Had a Fan Which She Kept Always in Motion': Puerto Rican Women's Dress at a Time of Social and Cultural Transition." In *The Latin American Fashion Reader*, edited by Regina Root, (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

they were invited under the auspices of fellowship and friendship into the intimate sphere of women's personal and family life.

A number of post-colonial feminist scholars have shown that domestic spaces are far from apolitical, and often serve as informal yet powerful sites where the cultural business of "empire-building" takes place.¹⁹⁵ According to Mary Louise Pratt, the private sphere of women's homes operates as sites of cultural interaction and (re)education "contact zones" where "...cultures that have been on historically separate trajectories intersect or come into contact with each other and establish a society, often in the contexts of colonialism."¹⁹⁶ Until 1954, Avon's direct selling system, product demonstrations and recruitment ideology of economic uplift remained geographically bounded to the United States. Avon's Latin American sales representatives enabled Avon to launch a transnational system of beauty practices, gender ideologies, and consumption habits it would implement around the world in the coming years. Because direct selling is highly intimate and personal, Avon's archive contains little evidence of what actually *happened* in these early homes where the cultural "business" of selling Avon occurred. According to Gil Joseph, "Contact zones are not geographic places with stable significations; they may represent attempt at hegemony but are simultaneously sites of multivocality; of negotiation, borrowing, and exchange, and of redeployment and reversal."¹⁹⁷ The same is true with regards to the sales process and personal interaction between Avon's Latin American representatives and their customers. It is impossible to know which of Avon's beauty regimens women adopted, adapted, or ignored; the gendered and sexual mores that shaped their

¹⁹⁵ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather; Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* edited by Ann Laura Stoler, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.)

¹⁹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd ed.(London New York: Routledge, 2008,) 1.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 5

attitudes about cosmetics; and/or the socio- economic factors that influenced their purchasing decisions.

Despite these limitations, the documents in Avon's archive provides evidence of a relatively uniform system of sales strategies, gendered behaviors, and values Avon encouraged its Latin American representatives to deploy on their sales calls. Avon saw its unique product demonstrations and the fact that it taught consumers how to use them as the key to "forming and shaping and developing demands for [Avon] products abroad."¹⁹⁸ Avon's Latin American representatives stood in the middle of this process. She was the cultural broker who took Avon's carefully crafted selling advice and adapted it on her individual sales calls. Within the pages of Avon's Latin American newsletter, *Panorama*, the sales strategies Avon executives developed in the United States and trained their Latin American representatives to adopt in "contact zones" across Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico illustrate a complex interplay of gendered, classed, and racial ideologies ambassadors of beauty were instructed to deliver to homes throughout Latin America.

Delivering Modernity at Home

While the advertisements Avon aired on televisions and in popular magazines and newspapers touted Avon as the world's most famous cosmetics company and introduced Latin American women to the concept of direct-selling, Avon's representative newsletter, *Panorama*, touted the prestige and rewards of selling Avon by featuring reward prizes, "up to date" sale strategies, product innovations, and authoritative information about Avon's ever-evolving line of beauty products. Inside the pages of *Panoramas*, Latin American representatives were both

¹⁹⁸ "Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau," Avon International Division: General Manager's Conference, 1963," RG II: Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972, Box 69.

represented and instructed to see themselves as beauty ambassadors who delivered the gift of modern beauty through Avon's affordable, high quality products. Like any successful handbook, *Panoramas* included a range of visual images to illustrate their points. Similar to the display cases in department stores, the social tableaux in print advertisements, and the untroubled version of modern living often featured in early 1950s television shows, *Panoramas* presented images of the "the good life" representatives could both earn and deliver. They illustrated what an ideal Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, Cuban, or Mexican Avon representative looked like and wore on her sales calls, as well as the kinds of homes she was expected to visit. Beginning with its front covers, *Panorama* advertised Avon's version of modern living with images of upper class, white Avon Ladies calling on generic suburban homes that mirrored those in the United States but were intended to signify homes in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico, and Cuba. The captions reiterated Avon's transnational themes of uplift and self improvement with taglines like "Towards a Better Future" (Venezuela), "Road to Success" (Mexico); "The World of the Modern Woman" (Cuba); "Bringing a new world of Triumphs" (Puerto Rico).¹⁹⁹

Promoting mass consumption was central to achieving the modern lifestyle Avon advocated and that representatives were expected to communicate to their clients.²⁰⁰ *Panoramas* instructed Avon representatives on how to help their customers achieve this modern, suburban lifestyle. Representatives encouraged customers to take advantage of Avon's monthly promotions for deodorant, soap, and hand lotion and deployed a number of sales strategies to solicit large and repeat orders from their clients. They also described Avon's soaps, hand

¹⁹⁹ *Panorama* Venezuela, Campaign 3, 1955, Box 105; *Panorama* Mexico, Campaign #4, 1958, Box 95; *Panorama* Cuba, Campaign #11, 1960, Box 82; *Panorama* Puerto Rico Campaign #1, 1965, Box 96. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

²⁰⁰ A range of business and cultural historians have traced the development and "making" of a consumption based society. See Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*. 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

creams, fragrances as essential household items that required “constant, daily use.”²⁰¹ As Timothy Burke notes in his social history of modern hygiene in Zimbabwe, transforming developing nations into hygiene and beauty “markets” historically has required companies to present their goods as essential to achieving a civilized, modern, and healthy lifestyle.²⁰² Avon’s *Panorama*’s employed a similar strategy, although instead of relying exclusively on mass advertising campaigns, it trained representatives to convey this message to their clients by presenting themselves as ambassadors of modern beauty and hygiene. In addition to serving as a practical training guide, *Panoramas* communicated specific messages and prescriptive behaviors that linked the consumption of Avon’s products as the key to modern health and hygiene. Avon’s decision to introduce grooming and hygiene products before touting color cosmetics followed the same economic and cultural pattern of many U.S. and European beauty and toiletry manufacturers that exported their goods abroad.²⁰³ In Puerto Rico, for example, articles reminded representatives to tell their clients that shampooing was an essential weekly grooming practice for everyone in the family, regardless of the season or temperature.²⁰⁴

Panoramas also regularly invoked the needs of an omnipresent, universal Mrs. Consumer who always had her family’s best interest at heart. Women were positioned as the gate keepers for their husband and children’s hygiene needs, a domestic division of gendered consumption

²⁰¹ Presenting their products as essential to good grooming and hygiene, rather than as luxury goods is one of the primary marketing tropes employed by cosmetics industry, beginning with campaigns in the USA during the 1890s and then refined for export markets. This is also an argument about advertising’s role in turning goods into commodities and has been discussed and debated extensively within (neo) Marxist critiques of advertising. See for example, Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) For a focused discussion on advertising’s role in elevating beauty and hygiene products as “essential” goods in the U.S., see Kathy Peiss’s *Hope in a Jar* and Juliann Sivulka’s *Stronger than Dirt*.

²⁰² Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men and Lux Women*, 164.

²⁰³ Geoffrey Jones, “Blond-Haired and Blue-Eyed.”

²⁰⁴ *Panorama* Puerto Rico, Campaign #1, 1954, Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions, Box 96.

practices that often characterize modern, Western consumption-oriented societies.²⁰⁵

Representatives encouraged their customers to use their good taste and female intuition when selecting Avon's aftershaves and colognes for her husband because as one article advised, "...women knew men needed to use these products every day."²⁰⁶ In return, their husbands would appreciate her thoughtfulness. Similar to Avon Lady's canvassing suburban neighborhoods in the United States during this time, Avon's Latin American Representatives reminded women of their responsibility to think of their entire family's grooming needs.

Panorama reminded representatives that "organized households," and the responsible mothers who ran them, should buy deodorant for everyone, invoking themes of cult of domesticity deployed in the United States. Like their U.S. counterparts, early Latin American *Panoramas* regularly positioned women as the guardians of their family's hygiene and often likened their maternal virtue to their willingness to purchase Avon's hygiene products.

Panoramas reinforced themes in Avon's mass advertising campaigns that promoted itself as the "world's most famous cosmetics company." This marketing trope relied heavily on discourses of scientific improvement and authoritative statements from "world famous" cosmetologists or doctors who worked at Avon's state of the art research facilities. Avon reinforced its "beauty through science" mantra by advising Latin American representatives to emphasize product attributes they could physically show their customers. The back of each *Panorama* included step-by-step instructions for demonstrating specific product innovations like

²⁰⁵ Feminist historians are quick to note women's labor and construction as consumers is not uniform, but rather historical process that varies. For examples see individual essays in Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough's *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) and Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 150-55.

²⁰⁶ *Panorama* Puerto Rico, Campaign #1, 1954, Box 96, Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

the quick-drying formula in Avon's deodorant; the fresh scent and smoothness of Avon's revolutionary lanolin hand cream; and the magic of aerosol perfumes.²⁰⁷

Following the research and development pattern it developed in the United States during the 1950s, Avon introduced its Latin American representatives to the science of skin care. According to Avon, face washing was no longer a hygiene practice requiring soap and water but a matter of science advocated by its "world famous cosmetologists" who urged women to preserve their skin's natural beauty and youth by washing, refreshing, and moisturizing it with Avon's three-step process every day.²⁰⁸ Although U.S. *Outlooks* and the beauty culture in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s invoked similar themes of scientific advancements as the key to women's health and beauty, *Panoramas* usually described and illustrated specific beauty rituals and products in more detail. For example, some beauty rituals, like how to properly shampoo one's hair, were considered a routine hygiene practice in the United States by the late 1950s, but required additional "how to" explanations and rationalization in markets like Venezuela, where Avon claims to have pioneered the shampoo market.

Democratizing Beauty

Championing women's inherent *right* to be beautiful emerged as one of the most pervasive transnational themes in both Avon's domestic and international representative newsletters.²⁰⁹ This democratic enterprise hinged upon training Avon representatives to think of themselves as beauty experts who possessed insider knowledge about fashionable cosmetics trends and who, regardless of their geographic location or national origin, could deliver authoritative and helpful knowledge to their customers. Articles reminded Latin American Representatives of their responsibility to share these insights with friends and neighbors and to

²⁰⁷ *Panorama Mexico*, Campaign #3, 1958, Box 95, Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

²⁰⁸ *Panorama Mexico*, Campaign #8, 1959, Box 95. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

²⁰⁹ Please refer to Chapter 1 for a discussion of Avon's domestic sales strategies.

help women “up-date” their looks to maximize their individual potential. By framing their work as a benevolent service, *Panoramas* championed the idea that beauty was accessible to all women, especially those who were unsure or intimidated by the ever-changing list of “Do’s and Don’ts” in cosmetics usage. With Avon, women could learn and practice these techniques in privacy of their homes.

One of these evolving modern beauty practices included promoting the regular use of color cosmetics. Although early *Panorama*’s focused on teaching representatives about the benefits of skin care and its other toiletry product, by their third month of operation, *Panoramas* regularly included features about the art of color cosmetics. *Panoramas* in each subsidiary reiterated similar beauty advice and techniques, although the specific products and merchandising varied based on the manufacturing and shipping capabilities.²¹⁰ For example in Mexico, Avon did not promote color cosmetics until well into its first year of operations in 1958, after which it dedicated two editions to teaching Mexican representatives “How to sell Make-up” and “The Magic of Color.”²¹¹ Despite these local variances, all *Panoramas* provided authoritative information and step-by-step demonstrations on the proper application of foundation, powder, rouge, and lipstick. Foundation was described as the “first step for modern make-up” and the basis for modern women’s beauty system; powder was “indispensible” and lipstick was required to catch people’s attention.²¹²

To help promote its new eyeliners, mascaras, and eye shadow, *Panoramas* provided representatives detailed drawings and instructions on how to apply Avon’s new products, while also acknowledging reservations Latin American representatives and their customers had about

²¹⁰ Quality control of Avon’s products emerged as a major theme in Avon’s domestic manager newsletters. Local manufacturing varied in its early subsidiaries, with some countries receiving products shipped from the U.S. and others, like Mexico, manufactured all of Avon’s products using local ingredients. See *Avon Direct Line*, April 1958.

²¹¹ Mexico *Panorama*, “De las Ultimas Novedades en Maquillaje,” Campaign #8, 1958; Box 95. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

²¹² Ibid.

them. To naturalize the use of mascara and eye shadow, a 1958 *Panorama* in Mexico reminded representatives that modern women “...who wants good grooming and a full make-up look use mascara to make their lashes longer and thicker.” One simply had to learn how to properly apply these new products, a feat that was easily demonstrated and practiced with the help of an Avon Representative.²¹³ Avon framed the use of color cosmetics as an extension of modernity, and encouraged representatives to remind their clients that eye make-up was an essential to every modern woman’s beauty rituals.

According to *Panorama*, Avon Representatives were responsible for helping their friends and neighbors modernize their beauty regimes to ensure each woman looked her “best.” Avon encouraged its Latin American representatives to see themselves as ambassadors who championed a democratic version of beauty that was equally accessible to all women, especially to those who were unsure or intimidated by the “do’s and don’ts” of tasteful cosmetics usage. Women unsure or intimidated of wearing make-up could learn about and practice these techniques in privacy of their homes with the assistance of a trained expert. Avon’s step by step instructions advocated specific behaviors and thus naturalized everything from the daily use of foundation and eyeliner to washing one’s face with Avon’s three step system. Avon’s sphere of influence on shaping women’s behaviors and expectations of what constituted normative beauty ideals differed, and may have surpassed, that of other U.S. and European cosmetic companies whose influence remained limited to print and television advertisements because before they entered the “contact zones” Latin American Avon representatives had a barrage of instructions, advice, and sales strategies at their disposal. According to Kathy Peiss, Avon representatives’ training and personal contact with customers were as important as the images of female beauty that circulated in the mass media, both in the United States and internationally:

²¹³ Ibid.

Even more important than the mix of national types and looking in selling American cosmetics abroad has been the use of local agents and beauty experts who reconciled American-style beauty images with the concerns, appearances, and aspirations of their countrywomen. Product demonstrations and woman-to-woman advertising had spurred the growth of the U.S. beauty industry after 1900; teaching women how to use cosmetics, ritualizing the use of make-up, and bringing beauty aids into the public eye were as crucial to American beauty culture as the circulation of beauty images in advertising and the mass media.²¹⁴

“Avon Llama” television commercials, print ads, and movie trailers enhanced these techniques and presented Latin American Avon Ladies as a beauty expert trained in the world’s most innovative and modern beauty trends. They touted the “millions and millions” of Avon’s satisfied customers around the world, the majority of whom resided in the United States and Avon’s new subsidiaries in Western Europe. Yet Avon presented itself as a global cosmetic company that encompassed the world, rather than limiting itself to a geographic or national concept of an “American” beauty.

The images of Avon Ladies inside the pages of its Latin American *Panoramas* never utilized imagery that explicitly linked Avon to the United States, except in the occasional articles that referred to Avon’s state-of the art research and development center in Suffern, New Jersey. It still raises questions about the degree to which local women identified with the suburban lifestyle and brand of middle class respectability Avon promoted. Like any advertisement, the images of Latin American Avon Lady’s with their hats and pearls did not necessarily reflect the various identities and lived experiences of the women selling and purchasing Avon, especially when compared to the scattered photos of early Latin American representatives in pages of *Panorama*. This raises important questions about Avon’s claim to beauty authority in Latin

²¹⁴ Peiss, “Educating the Eye of the Beholder,” 107.

America where the majority of its customers more than likely had little in common with the image of white femininity Avon portrayed in its print and television commercials. How did Avon navigate the racial politics of difference of selling beauty in Latin America?

The Racial Politics of Selling Beauty in Latin America

Panoramas, like their U.S. counterpart *Outlook*, served a variety of purposes in facilitating the expansion of Avon's global beauty business. As sales aids, instruction manuals, and advertisements, these newsletters promoted the kind of lifestyle and consumption habits Avon wanted its representatives to sell. Similar to other cosmetic and toiletry advertisements, Avon's representative newsletters deployed visual imagery and emotional appeals that played on well-established racial, gendered and class differences that helped shape normative expectations about womanhood and beauty. As discussed in Chapter 1, the politics of difference shaped the business of representing and selling beauty in United States during the early and mid twentieth century and often promoted ideal female beauty as white, an exclusionary and racialized marketing strategy Avon refined during the 1950s. Because of their domestic success, a number of U.S. and European cosmetics and personal care companies continued to promote whiteness as a natural and desirable ideal in their international advertising campaigns, especially in regions of the world inhabited with predominantly non-white populations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.²¹⁵ Anne McClintock calls this "commodity racism," in which the symbolic and racialized symbols of soap "...persuasively mediated the Victorian poetics of racial hygiene and

²¹⁵ See Kathy Peiss's "Educating the Eye of the Beholder;" Joanne Herschfield's *Imagining La Chica Moderna*; Chapter 2 in Timothy Burke's *Lifebuoy Men and Lux Women*; Evelyn Nankano Glenn, "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners." *Gender and Society* 22, no. 3 (2008): 281-302. For a contemporary examination of skin lighteners in India see Kavita Karan's "Obsessions with Fair Skin: Color Discourses in Indian Advertising." *Advertising Society and Review* 9, no. 2 (2008).

imperial progress.”²¹⁶ While McClintock frames her discussion of commodity racism within the imperial politics of the United Kingdom and its mission to convert non-white populations in the British Empire into civilized consumers, a number of U.S. companies utilized similar marketing ploys both at home and abroad.

Matthew Frye Jacobson details how images of non-white people circulated in the United States during the early nineteenth century in magazines, postcards, and other visual ephemera and often depicted as uncivilized savages in need of benevolent uplift.²¹⁷ Many U.S. consumer goods companies operated under similar auspices of conversion and marketed toothpaste, deodorant, toilet soap, and skin-lighteners to non-white populations that promised moral and physical regeneration.²¹⁸ Pond’s skin vanishing cream is one of the earliest and most explicit attempts to consciously promote whiteness as superior and desirable. Pond’s originally marketed itself for immigrant women in the United States during the early twentieth century by using images of prominent European aristocrats and socialites in its advertisements. By the 1930s, with the help of the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency, it had successfully exported this racialized marketing trope to women in Malaysia and regions of Africa.²¹⁹

Like most other U.S. cosmetics companies, Avon relied on images whiteness for its de facto marketing and sales strategies in the United States and abroad. During its first year of

²¹⁶ Anne McClintock and American Council of Learned Societies, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, (New York: Routledge, 1995,) 209.

²¹⁷ See Chapter 3, “Parables of Progress: Travelogues, Ghetto Sketches, and Fictions of the Foreigners” in Matthew Frye Jacobson’s *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*, 1st ed., (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

²¹⁸ For representations in U.S. history see Chapter 5 in Kathy Peiss’s *Hope in a Jar*; Tiffany Gill, “I Had My Own Business...So I Didn’t Have to Worry”: Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturalists, and the Politics of African-American Female Entrepreneurship.” In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, edited by Philip Scranton, 169-94, (New York: Routledge, 2001). For depictions internationally see Chapter 6 in Timothy Burke’s *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*; and Chapter 6 in Denise Sutton’s, “Globalizing Modern Beauty: The Women’s Editorial Department at the J.Walter Thompson Advertising Company, 1910-1945,” PhD Dissertation, 1-319, Clark University, 2004.

²¹⁹ Sutton, *Globalizing Beauty*, 262.

operation in Puerto Rico during 1954, Avon marketed a limited range of grooming and toiletry articles like perfumed deodorant, soap, and hand crème. The rhetorical appeals in its sales catalogues repeatedly framed good hygiene as pivotal to modern living and presented these products as remedies to Puerto Rican's hygiene dilemmas.²²⁰ These early Puerto Rican *Panoramas* are the only Avon newsletters that explicitly reference deodorant and shampooing as the key to maintaining good hygiene. This could be partly be a reflection of Puerto Rico's tropical climate; however, Avon's sales strategies and persuasive rhetoric also reflects the paternal, civilizing mission that shaped its management training programs and general attitude towards Puerto Rico as an export market. When viewed in conjunction with U.S. state sponsored health programs in Puerto Rico that linked women's sexual and reproductive health to racial discourses of science and morality, Avon's racially-infused marketing can be interpreted as an extension of U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico and the power imbalances that have shaped relations between both countries.²²¹

As discussed in Chapter 3, Avon's international expansion embraced a liberal development ideology that centered on rhetoric of uplift and service that many U.S. companies, philanthropic, and church organizations invoked to justify their educational, religious or market missions outside the United States.²²² Throughout Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba, inside the homes of their friends and neighbors, Latin American Avon representatives were engaged in a

²²⁰ See list of Puerto Rico *Panoramas* in Appendix A.

²²¹ For a critical survey of U.S. sponsored public health programs in Puerto Rico see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). Amy Kaplan's *Anarchy of Empire* also explores the history of the United States colonial interest and dependency on Puerto Rico in the introduction. Other historians explore similar instances in other Latin American countries where U.S. public health programs, often working in alliance with local public health agencies and U.S.-based philanthropic organizations, claimed to solve health problems of local populations. See Steven Palmer, "Central American Encounters with Rockefeller Public Health, 1914-1921." In *Close Encounters: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. -Latin American Relations*, edited by Catherine Legrand Gilbert M. Joseph, Ricardo Salvatore, 311-32, (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

²²² Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*.

similar type of cultural work by educating and promoting specific consumer behaviors Avon touted as essential to modern hygiene and beauty. Given Avon's managerial ideology of uplift it instilled from its international general managers to its sales representatives, it is clear that Avon's early Latin American representatives were selling more than lipstick and perfume. In theory, Representatives sold the customers the idea that Avon's products secured them a place in a modern world. This civilizing dimension of Avon's international operations is most obvious and explicit in the neocolonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico and Avon's repeated references to hygiene in the late 1950s. It is also evident in articles that repeatedly referenced the critical role mothers played in safeguarding their family's health and well-being.

Avon also created a visual system of representing ethnic differences (or "sameness") similar to the one it developed in the United States. Early *Panoramas* and Avon advertising campaigns relied on visual images and cues that reproduced a discourse where whiteness served as the de facto beauty standard. Like the models in its U.S. *Outlook* newsletters, Avon's early Latin American *Panoramas* are dominated by images of fair skinned women with European features.²²³ For example, in Mexico, photographs of representatives include a high percentage of blond haired, fair skinned women.²²⁴ Avon also produced and disseminated similar images of

²²³ Assuming some sort of photographic truth in these *Panoramas* is misleading, as is attempting to guess the ethnic identities of women given the various historical and social circumstances that shaped racial politics in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Venezuela, and Cuba. At the risk of reaffirming racial stereotypes or misunderstandings, I make neither attempt nor claim on the ethnic identities of Avon's Latin American representatives except to observe shifts in Avon's representation of its early Latin American representatives. It is worth noting that many early *Panoramas* and sales catalogues include ink drawings, rather than photographs, thus making it difficult to gauge what ethnic affiliation the editorial staff intended to represent.

²²⁴ These early *Panoramas* were produced locally by an editorial staff that included Mexican women, yet it is difficult to ascertain who they were targeting, or what ethnic identities they intended to represent.

fair-skinned, Spanish speaking Avon Ladies in television, movie trailers, magazine, and newspaper advertisements.²²⁵

However, the notion that Avon relied solely on whiteness to sell its products is complicated by the racial dynamics in its other marketing strategies. Amongst the images of fair haired representatives, each subsidiary's *Panoramas* also include a number of dark haired, brown-eyed models. One dark haired woman in particular, graces the covers of several subsidiaries' *Panoramas* and appears as a possible Latin American counterpart to the iconic image of the Avon Lady in the United States during the 1960s. The ethnic identity of local Latin American representatives also complicates the notion that whiteness was the sole standard of racialized beauty Avon exported from the United States. As Avon's beauty ambassadors, Latin American representatives literally provided the "face" for Avon's corporate persona, its values, and the version of beauty and hygiene it hoped to sell. *Panoramas* repeatedly reminded representatives of the power of direct selling, personal relationships, and the image of respectability they were expected to maintain. Scattered throughout the pages of each subsidiaries' *Panoramas*, individual and group photos of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, and Venezuela women include captions that testify to the transformative benefits and emotional satisfaction of selling Avon.²²⁶ They also provide visual evidence that these early Latin American Avon representatives were neither homogenous nor uniform in their physical appearance. By and large, they appear older and less glamorous than the models in *Panoramas*,

²²⁵ One exception, Moreno notes, was U.S. based Palm-Olive, whose advertisements represented a more local, "Mexicanized" version of beauty by soliciting the endorsement of a famous hair salon in Mexico City and sponsoring radio shows that featured ranchera music and urban sounds that appealed to Mexico City's increasing population. See Moreno, *Yankee! Don't Go Home*, 137-142.

²²⁶ Records in the archive do not indicate the ethnic identity, social class, or age of the women who comprised Avon's first transnational team of beauty ambassadors.

but there is no way of ascertaining whether they identified as white, mestizo, Spanish, or any other socio-historic category of ethnic affiliation in their particular country.

As an advertisement and training guide for its representatives, the disconnect between models in *Panoramas* and the mestizo women who were more than likely buying and selling Avon reflects a technique often utilized in consumer advertisements, what Michael Schudson calls “capitalist realism” where life is reflected as it “ought to be rather than as it is.”²²⁷ Rather than promoting whiteness as the defining feature of Latin American Avon Ladies, *Panoramas* instead emphasized a suburban lifestyle marked by the relatively uniform images of middle class domestic life that Avon also promoted in the United States during the 1950s.

Questions still remain about the degree to which Avon’s transnational sales strategies fall within parameters of “cultural imperialism” or “Americanization,” terms often utilized to critique the global spread and consumption of U.S. cultural forms and/or the consumer-driven behavior advocated by transnational or U.S. corporations. Some cultural critics, like Latin American cultural studies scholar Nestor Canclini, argue that increasing number of U.S. media productions and cultural productions exported to Latin America have limited citizens access to the public sphere and reconfigured notions of cultural citizenship and belonging.²²⁸ Others, like American Studies scholar Rob Kroes critique growing influence of transnational corporations for

²²⁷ For more information about ads as artistic representations of capital realism see Michael Schudson’s, *Advertising, and the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984) 211.

²²⁸ Latin American cultural studies scholar Naestor Canclini is especially critical of the growing influence and unequal import of U.S. media and cultural productions. See Nãestor Garcãia Canclini,. *Consumers and Citizens : Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*, Cultural Studies of the Americas; V. 6. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); for an extended conversation in a historical perspective see Joseph, Gilbert "Close Encounters." In *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S. Latin American Relations*, edited by Catherine Legrand Gilbert M. Joseph, Ricardo Salvatore, 3-46, (Duke, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998.)

advocating a consumption-oriented lifestyle and identities rooted in marketplace values, behaviors, and citizenship.²²⁹

It is clear that Avon poses a temporal challenge to these more recent critiques of U.S. media imperialism that have been aided by the advent of satellite television, conglomerate global cable networks, and the internet.²³⁰ Avon's early forays instead resemble the gendered messages Victoria De Grazia identifies in U.S. consumer advertisements in Western Europe following the conclusion of World War II.²³¹ Unlike companies who relied on the mass media and international advertising agencies, Avon is unique because from its earliest export activities in 1954, it relied on local women and their social networks to broker the cultural appeal of its American-based products and beauty practices. Other U.S. cosmetics companies relied on visual representations of Hollywood starlets, or international advertising agencies like J. Walter Thompson to generate culturally-specific marketing campaigns for their international subsidiaries.²³²

The local/global relationship and transnational connections between Avon's executives in the United States, its Latin American representatives, and their interaction with local women in the contact zones of their living rooms is better understood by Stuart Hall's discussion of identity, ethnic difference and nationhood. According to Hall, the globalization of mass cultural forms (like Avon) are characterized by Western-centeredness, that is not completely homogenized but one that "...wants to absorb differences within what is a larger, overarching

²²⁹ Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). Meanwhile a number of media studies scholars like John Tomlinson, refute claims of a homogenizing, uniform imposition of global cultural forms and instead argue that globalization of culture is almost always negotiated within local cultural contexts and traditions. See John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism a Critical Introduction*. Second Edition. New York: Continuum, 2002.

²³⁰ Naestor Garc a Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*.

²³¹ See Chapter 9, "A Model Mrs. Consumer" in De Grazia's, *Irresistible Empire*.

²³² See Chapter 6 in Sutton, *Globalizing Beauty*.

framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world.” Rather than obliterating other cultures, Hall argues that power operates *through* them, to adapt and respond to different racial and gendered identities.²³³ In Avon’s case, its international expansion relied less on the gendered and racial representations of beauty in its mass advertising campaigns and more on the persuasive power of a transnational female sales force that it managed and trained through instructions and advice featured in *Panoramas*. These managerial strategies, along with their illustrations, encouraged Latin American representatives to embrace and *sell* Avon’s conception of the world to women and to present Avon’s commercial beauty products and “how-to” advice as essential to modern living.

The flexibility of Avon’s direct-sales strategy and the access it granted Avon to women’s private spheres enabled Avon to adapt to women’s national, regional, and individual women’s beauty habits and preferences. From the beginning of their startup operations until the early 1970s, Avon’s international subsidiaries carried out the general philosophies of Avon’s corporate headquarters in the United States, but functioned as relatively independent and “decentralized” units.²³⁴ The images of female beauty and fashion in *Panoramas* followed many of the advertising themes used in the United States but were ultimately guided by cultural norms and customs in their local markets. Blonde haired-blue eyed models were featured with an equal, if not higher number of brunette models, and as Avon began increasing the number of products it manufactured and distributed in Latin America, images of children, men, and families increasingly appeared in *Panoramas* and customer catalogues. By the early 1970s, Avon’s Latin

²³³ Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global,” 28.

²³⁴ No author. “Avon International Division, General Manager’s Conference, June 1963,” 4. Box 69: Series XI: Avon International. Subseries A: Admin, 1957-1972.

American division had established its own collection of local models and photos it used to support other Latin American start-up operations like Argentina, which opened 1972.²³⁵

Throughout each subsidiary, *Panoramas*, continued to provide instructions and step-by-step guides devoid of explicit references to the United States or “American-ness;” however, they continued to instruct Latin American representatives on beauty practices predicated on U.S. trends in skin, hair, and color cosmetics. Their themes remained the same across state and national borders: Avon promoted beauty as an achievable goal for every woman; reminded representatives of their responsibility in facilitating this goal; and reiterated its commitment to selling high quality products at affordable prices. The cultural appeal of Avon’s products, mediated by local sales women Avon continually monitored and motivated with its incentive prizes and special discounts, helped Avon unite its representatives in a transnational mission to deliver beauty, service, and economic opportunity to women in the United States and in Latin America. Avon Vice President of its South American Division, Henry Nadieau, summarized what he felt to be the universal power and adaptability of Avon’s at-home sales system when he stated, “We make her want the things we have to sell- the way we sell them.”²³⁶

Building its international operations from ground up through a range of transnational connections proved to be a successful strategy for Avon. By the time its international general managers reconvened for a world merchandising conference in 1968, the number of beauty ambassadors Avon recruited around the world increased 275 percent to 206, 000. Between 1954 and 1972, Avon also opened subsidiaries in sixteen different countries; nine in Europe; five in

²³⁵ This is evident, for example, in proof sheets of early Argentina *Panoramas* where explicit notes about the national origins of Avon’s Puerto Rican and Venezuelan models are marked. “Argentina Editorial,” 1973, Box 71. Series 11, Avon International, Subseries D: Sales Promotions.

²³⁶ Keynote Address, H.D. Nadieau, “Avon International Division, General Manager’s Conference,” Box 69: Series IV: Sub B. – International, “History of Avon International, 1953-1969.”

Latin America; and two in Asia. As a testament to its newfound status as the world's leading manufacturer of cosmetics and toiletry products, Avon moved its new corporate headquarters to Madison Avenue in 1972 and furnished its lobby with original art from each of its international subsidiaries. Meanwhile executives armed themselves for a decade where Avon's international growth would mirror its domestic financial success in the 1960s. In less than two decades, Avon had successfully exported its theme of democratic uplift and opportunity to women on three continents. These women helped Avon carry out its mission of bringing beauty to home of every woman in the "free world" and enabled it to become the world's number one cosmetics company in the world. However, the 1970s also ushered in a decade of change in the United States that forced Avon to reevaluate the corporate persona and image of Avon Lady it had so carefully crafted and exported during the 1950s and 1960s. This next chapter shifts the focus on Avon's transnational connections back to the United States and analyze the strategies the company devised to combat Americans' increasing concerns about racial equality and responsible business practices.

“We are committed to positive programs to prevent any discrimination whatsoever in hiring and promotion practices and in the treatment of people, because of their race, color, creed, sex or age.”

-Excerpt from Avon’s Statement of Corporate Responsibility 1972 ²³⁷

Chapter 4: Creating a Multicultural Soul: Avon, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Race in the 1970s

While Avon was developing and refining its marketing and recruitment strategies in Latin and South America in the 1960s, people in the United States were experiencing a turbulent decade where racial politics, environmental concerns, and social movements increasingly made their way to the agendas of U.S. companies. A month before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April of 1968, upper level Avon management received a confidential memo outlining its new corporate philosophy and approach to “minority group problems.” First and foremost, it established Avon’s compliance with equal opportunity guidelines that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin.²³⁸ The policy further explained that like all industries, Avon had an obligation to promote equal opportunity for multiple reasons: it was morally correct; generated more taxes; decreased the likelihood of a welfare state and stabilized urban communities. Avon’s corporate memo concluded: “[The] sooner American business assumes more responsibility for the problem, the sooner urban problems can be fixed.”²³⁹ Avon’s commitment to socially responsible business practices and its assumption of a proactive role in “fixing” America’s social problems reflects a major tipping point for U.S. corporations. In the late 1960s, many companies began implementing racially-

²³⁷ “Statement of Corporate Responsibility, 1972,” RG II, Series 1: Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

²³⁸ “Procedural Bulletin on Avon’s Plans For Progress, March 1968,” RG II, Series 1: Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

²³⁹ Ibid.

inclusive policies in their fight against racism and poverty.²⁴⁰ The Avon memo further explained that its moral obligation also meant increased consumer spending in the booming beauty and personal care industry. From Avon's perspective, the bottom line was that it paid to be socially responsible.

Avon's involvement with President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and its participation in the federal government's National Business Alliance and "Plans for Progress Program" marked the first major initiative in Avon's eighty year history to acknowledge, albeit in a confidential internal memo, the potential profits of proactively addressing domestic social unrest and racial discord. More importantly, it laid the groundwork for Avon's "what's good for society is good for business" ideology. This ideology would permeate its U.S. public relations campaigns and recruiting strategies amidst movements for the ethnic pride, consumer rights, and women's liberation in the 1970s. and subsequently shape its global image and marketing strategies outside the United States. Avon's proactive stance on social issues that consumed the American public in the early 1970s raises a number of questions about what has become commonly referred to in public discourse as "corporate social responsibility."²⁴¹ What was Avon's rationale for adopting corporate social responsibility protocol? How did Avon define its responsibilities in the United States? To whom and for what did it see itself as being "responsible"? What strategies did Avon develop to communicate its proactive role in American social life? And most importantly, what were the results of Avon's corporate social responsibility program?

²⁴⁰ Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*. 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009,) 270.

²⁴¹ For a historical overview and expanding uses of the term "corporate social responsibility" see Philip Cochran's essay, "The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility." *Business Horizons* 40 (2007): 449-54. Specific definitions and their application to Avon's policies will be discussed in the following pages.

To answer these questions, this chapter analyzes the discourse of “corporate social responsibility” and follows the policies, actions and public relations campaigns Avon created to combat widespread public concern in the 1970s when a palpable air of racial strife and public distrust forced many U.S. corporations to reevaluate their social policies and public images. Following the “archival grain,” this chapter examines corporate social responsibility within the framework and policies outlined in Avon’s 1972 Corporate Social Responsibility Plan (CSR), the first codified statement of corporate responsibility that resulted in institutional and policy changes in Avon’s internal culture and external relations with the American public. The first section outlines the strategies Avon devised to address consumers’ concerns about product safety; the environmental hazards associated with large scale industrial production; and the ethics of the direct marketing. The majority of this chapter, however, examines Avon’s CSR policies that dealt with issues of workplace discrimination, the area in which Avon invested the most time and resources. Although sex and age discrimination were also included in Avon’s 1972 CSR policy, this chapter explores “discrimination” as it applied to race and color (terms designated by Avon), while Chapter 4 explores its gendered dimensions and Avon’s relationship and management of female employees and sales representatives in the United States.

Corporate Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century

The relationship between large corporations and the American public have been debated and discussed in a variety of academic disciplines, each with its own set of competing narratives of working class heroes and villainous barons of big business.²⁴² Within the field of American

²⁴² See for example, Frederick, W.C. "From Csr1 to Csr2 : “The Maturing of Business and Society Thought,” (Working Paper 279, Graduate School of Business, University of Pittsburgh, 1978), *Business and Society* 33, no. 2 (1978): 150-63; Philip Cochran, "The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility." *Business Horizons* 40 (2007): 449-54; Nels L. Gunderson, *Corporate Social Responsibility: A Survey of the Literature*, (Public Administration Series--Bibliography,. Monticello, Ill.: Vance Bibliographies, 1986).

business history, most scholars trace the institutionalized, intellectual history of corporate responsibility to debates at Harvard Business School during the 1930s about whether a corporation's primary obligation was to generate profits for its shareholders or to benefit the collective good of American society.²⁴³ By the 1950s, scholars settled this debate in favor of the collective good of the American public as a result of the patriotic (and profitable) role U.S. corporations played during World War II and their subsequent alliance with the U.S. government during the Cold War. According to business historian Bert Spector, both corporations and the U.S. government invested in touting America's free market economy and democratic right to purchase and consumer goods as a critical component of U.S. Cold War ideology in the battle against communism.²⁴⁴ However, by the late 1960s, Philip Cochran argues, the protests of the Vietnam War, combined with the Civil Rights and consumer advocacy movements "had permanently change[d] the business environment in America and the world."²⁴⁵ A large part of this change meant that the discourse of corporate responsibility transitioned from a largely theoretical debate amongst business scholars and corporate elites to pragmatic, codified, action-oriented responses that guided corporations as they anticipated, reacted, and devised ways to profit (and sometimes solve) social ills that plagued American society. William Frederick describes this 1970s process as a transition from corporate social *responsibility* (CSR1) to corporate social *responsiveness* (CSR2) where many companies made inroads to federal government programs and drafted institutional corporate responsibility policies.²⁴⁶ A central part of this second phase, the "responsive" element, required companies to anticipate future areas of

²⁴³ Bert Spector, "'Business Responsibilities in a Divided World:' the Cold War Roots of the Corporate Social Responsibility Movement." *Enterprise and Society* 9, no. 2 (2008): 314-36.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Philip Cochran, "The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility," *Business Horizons* 50 (2007): 449-54.

²⁴⁶ W.C. Frederick, "From Csr1 to Csr2: The Maturing of Business and Society Thought (Working Paper 279, Graduate School of Business, University of Pittsburgh, 1978)." *Business and Society* 33, no. 2 (1978): 150-63.

social concern, as well as successfully communicate their proactive policies to their customers, employees, and even the federal government. This responsibility often fell on companies' public relations departments, which unlike marketing and advertising departments became responsible for creating and selling positive images of the company itself, rather than specific products or services. Throughout its early days as the California Perfume Company, Avon's founder, David McConnell actively created a benevolent corporate persona for his company, beginning with his decision to recruit female sales representatives.²⁴⁷ To help cement Avon's image as company dedicated to service and satisfaction, McConnell consciously promoted "trust" as a central element of Avon's corporate image and sales technique. Avon promised its customers that its products would be "pure, harmless, and exactly as represented." To this day, this promise remains one of the primary selling tools Avon Representatives are encouraged to employ.²⁴⁸

The 1970s presented a new set of hurdles for Avon's management as the American public became increasingly suspect and cynical of the motivations that guided the behavior of everyone from elected government officials to profit-mongering corporations whose questionable practices included unabashedly polluting the environment and purposely misleading Americans about the safety of consumer products.²⁴⁹ In 1971, Avon President David Mitchell commissioned Avon's first systematic review of its social policies and programs. Six months later, the social audit team presented their findings, along with a "Statement on Corporate Responsibility" that

²⁴⁷ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*, (Berkeley: University of California Press,) 1998.

²⁴⁸ "1904 Sales Catalog, "Series 3, Box 113,. McConnell devised a number other of rhetorical strategies that shaped the CPC's image, including positioning the company as a nurturing, family like environment that appealed to women.

²⁴⁹ Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed; the Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile*, (New York: Grossman, 1965) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), are often cited as two most influential consumer-advocate books of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

outlined Avon's current policies, suggested changes, and future goals for three core areas: the consumer, workplace discrimination/equal opportunities for all, and the environment. In a 1972 issue of Avon's employee newsletter, *Avon & You*, the term "Corporate Social Responsibility" officially entered employee lexicon and as Avon renewed its commitment to consumers.²⁵⁰ Avon created a "Committee on Corporate Responsibility" to fulfill the commitments of its CSR plan.²⁵¹ Rather than promoting corporate social responsibility as a new policy, Mitchell reminded employees of Avon's history and the philosophy of its founder, David McConnell, who founded Avon in 1886 with a "sincere concern" for people and for "responsible corporate citizenship."²⁵²

To support Avon's commitment to corporate responsibility and citizenship, Mitchell combined the Government and Educational Affairs branches into a new "Government and Public Relations Department" whose primary responsibility was to communicate Avon's proactive stance toward social problems to the American public.²⁵³ Coordinating and communicating information about all aspects of Avon's CSR plans and its relationships with community organizations was paramount to Avon's responsive approach to corporate social responsibility, and its new Government and Public Affairs Office busied itself creating and distributing

²⁵⁰ "Statement of Corporate Responsibility, Avon Products, Inc." Reprinted in "The Voice of the Consumer: Avon Listens and Responds" *Avon and You* Summer 1972, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110, 5.

²⁵¹ "Information Bulletin: Committee on Corporate Responsibility, #554," October 16, 1972, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

²⁵² "Statement of Corporate Responsibility, Avon Products, Inc." Reprinted in "The Voice of the Consumer: Avon Listens and Responds" *Avon and You* Summer 1972, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110, 5.

²⁵³ David Farber, "The Torch Had Fallen." In *America in the 70s*, edited by Beth L. and David Farber Bailey, 9-28. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004.

numerous brochures, booklets and television advertisements to tout Avon's renewed commitment to workplace discrimination, consumer rights, and the environment.²⁵⁴

Consumer Rights Movement and the Environment

As Avon's Committee on Corporate Responsibility began the process of reevaluating Avon's policies, they recognized that air and water pollution ranked as one of the most pressing public concerns in the United States during the 1970s.²⁵⁵ Avon's new CSR policy proclaimed Avon's commitment to eliminating contamination of air and water, developing effective means for recycling their materials, and engineering their facilities to meet local, state, and federal requirements.²⁵⁶ Avon evaluated its current environmental programs, including visual and noise pollution, and being satisfied with the results, initiated few changes in its manufacturing plants. Instead, Avon began aggressively communicating its positive environmental policies to its employees, representatives, and the public by expanding the Avon Foundation's grants to include environmental programs and increasing its alliances with environmental and governmental organizations.²⁵⁷

The consumer rights movement presented more ominous challenges that directly affected Avon's public image. Concerns about product safety and increasing suspicion about the ethics direct-selling as multi-level "pyramid" schemes and at home "parties" threatened Avon's

²⁵⁴ Although Avon's 1972 official statement uses the term "corporate social responsibility," a term I use throughout the rest of this chapter, its codified mission statement, alliance with federal agencies, and proactive role in turning "responsibility" into business opportunities also matches Frederickson's definition of corporate social responsiveness (CSR2), that he sees as a major turning point in the 1970s. Thus, while I rely on Avon's terminology, it is important to note that within scholarly literature "corporate responsiveness" emerged as the term to describe companies proactive and strategic efforts address social changes in their policies and objectives.

²⁵⁵ "Information Bulletin: Committee on Corporate Responsibility, #554," *Policies/Environmental Protection*, April 1973, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

relationship with its customers and governmental regulatory agencies.²⁵⁸ To address public concerns about product safety and quality control, Avon voluntarily began providing information about the ingredients on its products a year before the Food and Drug Administration's law took effect in 1973.²⁵⁹ This preemptive move generated significant amount of positive press for Avon, as did its relationships with the Food and Drug Administration and local poison control centers. To better communicate its support of consumer concerns, Avon created a number of public service announcements with its "Avon Cares" program that encouraged consumers to contact Avon with their questions.²⁶⁰

Protecting the virtue of the direct selling industry and its increasingly vulnerable public image became the primary job of Avon's new Government and Public Relations office. By the early 1970s, the consumer rights movement had successfully jarred Avon into action, requiring both defensive and offensive maneuvering. Avon had already been in the business of educating consumers about the merits of door-to-door selling and cultivating relationships "...with a broad cross section of consumer groups, business organizations, and government."²⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, Avon had already established educational outreach programs with youth organizations and schools. However by the 1970s, Avon defended the ethics of direct marketing while also soliciting the opinions of their fastest growing segment of consumers: teens. In 1971 Avon's Educational Services office (later integrated into Public Relation and Government Affairs) surveyed 6,100 high school students around the country about their opinions on the 18 year old vote, the drug problem, the Civil Rights, and Women's Liberation movements, and distributed

²⁵⁸ "Information Bulletin: Committee on Corporate Responsibility," *Consumerism*, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

²⁵⁹ Enid Nemy, "Cosmetics Safety: Admittedly a Problem, but What's the Solution?" *New York Times*, Feb. 6 1972, 66.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ "Information Bulletin: Committee on Corporate Responsibility," *Consumerism*, RG II: Series 1: Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

the results to Avon's management and the administration at participating schools.²⁶² These students represented a ready-made focus group for Avon, and although the survey did not explicitly ask their opinions about Avon's products or services, it underscores the pivotal role Avon's Public Relations office played in strategically using its outreach programs to investigate and solicit information on youth culture.²⁶³ Avon's double mission to blunt criticisms against the direct selling industry while simultaneously enlisting the support and opinions of a generation of future new Avon representatives evolved in the 1970s into a powerful market research opportunity. While the consumer rights movement enabled Avon to channel the opinions and desires of America's disillusioned youth into marketing research campaigns, the next area of its CSR plan, workplace diversity, helped Avon redefine its relationship and attitude towards minority consumers, and in the process, marked the beginning of a new, racially inclusive corporate identity it would later export around the world.

Black Becomes Beautiful and Profitable at Avon

In its 1972 Statement of Corporate Responsibility, Avon expressed concern about the health, education, and welfare of all Americans, and publicly announced its commitment to combat workplace discrimination. The CSR statement defined "discrimination" as race, color, creed, sex, and age, and committed Avon to anti-discrimination programs to prevent

²⁶² "Market Research Reports," RG II: Series 8: Marketing. Sub A: Market Research and Development, Box 63. Most important issue was voting, because of Vietnam War. Second was pollution, where students favored more government regulation. Civil Rights ranked last, while the women's liberation movement, there was a slightly more negative than positive attitude (45% vs. 42%), including by female respondents. Their comments ranged from simple chauvinism to some girls thinking women were already "superior" to men and thus there was no need for Women's lib movement.

²⁶³ Avon also conducted private focus groups outside of public schools to survey teens' opinions of its image, products, and overall position in the youth cosmetics and fragrance market. See Market Research Reports "An Exploratory Study of the Needs and Attitudes of Teen-Agers with Regards to Present and Potential Avon Products" RG II: Series 8: Marketing. Sub A: Market Research and Development, Box 63. The encroachment of public spaces traditionally deemed off limits to commercial enterprises has been noted by a number of scholars; most recently James Twitchell has written about the "branding" of communal, "commercial-free" public spaces like museums, universities, and even churches in the United States. See James B Twitchell, *Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College, Inc., and Museumworld*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

discrimination” in all areas of its business, including hiring and promotion policies and its relationship with suppliers and dealers. “We do not deem mere compliance with the law to be sufficient, we regard it as imperative steps be taken throughout the company to insure that in every respect this policy of non-discrimination is actively followed.”²⁶⁴ This marked a radical shift from a corporate image rooted in whiteness Avon cultivated during the 1950s and 1960s, and its dismissal and exclusion of minority women discussed in Chapter 1.²⁶⁵

Whereas most cosmetic companies in the mid-twentieth century promoted whiteness as an achievable and desirable beauty ideal to black women, advertising products such as hair straighteners and skin lighteners that often included dangerous ingredients like lye or arsenic, there is no evidence that the California Perfume Company or Avon marketed itself or its products to black women. In later years, Avon would join other global beauty corporations in marketing skin lighteners in India and other regions of the world.²⁶⁶ From its founding in 1886 until the early 1920s, David McConnell recruited older, married, white women whose social status in their local communities enhanced Avon’s company image as a respectable employer of women and as a legitimate distributor of beauty products. As a result, Avon cultivated a corporate image that drew from, represented, and served the cultural tastes of white women, a practice George Lipsitz has described as the “possessive investment in whiteness.”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴, “Admin: Business Ethics and Policies, 1931-1977.” *Avon and You*: Summer 1972, p.5. RG I, Series 1: Admin, Box 110.

²⁶⁵ I use the terms “non-discrimination” and “discrimination” rather than “equal opportunity,” as outlined in Avon’s 1972 CSR policy. However, in Avon’s revised 1977 CSR policy, “work place discrimination” is replaced with term equal opportunity, reflecting the shifting political and public in the late 1970s.

²⁶⁶ Beginning in the mid 1990s, Avon began marketing and manufacture skin-lightening products especially in India, where a premium on whiteness has sparked an increase in the commercial skin lighteners by the global beauty industry. In a 1997 interview in the *New York Times*, Avon executives argued that a pre-existing, cultural demand for lighteners prompted its manufacturing and distribution.

²⁶⁷ Lipsitz describes the “possessive investment of whiteness” and states, “All whites do not benefit from the possessive investment in whiteness in precisely the same ways; the experiences of members of minority groups are not interchangeable. But the possessive investment in whiteness always affects individual and collective life chances

Avon's corporate policy did not directly prohibit Avon's female managers from actively recruiting women of color or Italian, Jewish, and other immigrant women deemed ethnic minorities during the early to mid twentieth century. According to Katina Manko's study of Avon's early history, Avon left this decision to the discretion district recruiting managers. When black women were recruited, district managers "were required to secure an additional deposit for their sample cases and catalogues, and made it clear that black representatives were restricted to sell in only black sections of town."²⁶⁸ Avon also forbade black sales representatives from purchasing goods on credit, a practice white sales representatives enjoyed. While these practices must have discouraged black women from joining Avon's team, the development of segregated sales territories in the 1940s created opportunities for black women. City managers began to identify neighborhoods by income and concentration of residences, designating territories either white or black. Thus, by the start of World War II, radio ads successfully recruited a number of black representatives in Washington D.C. and Philadelphia. While this was a step forward, Avon made the decision to maintain segregated urban sales offices, as one of its Southern male managers suggested.²⁶⁹ While this increased opportunities for black sales representatives, it did not begin a marketing campaign directed at black women. As Manko notes, "Although scattered evidence suggests that black women worked successfully in both urban and rural districts in the

and opportunities. Even in cases where minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness in U.S. politics, economics, and culture." See George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 22.

²⁶⁸ Katina Manko's survey on the CPC/Avon's early history has been especially helpful in helping me piece together Avon's relationship with black representatives pre 1960. For a more thorough discussion of Avon's early racial hiring practices see Manko, "Ding Dong! Avon Calling!," 93.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 220

pre-World War II era, neither published sales literature nor census identifies a single black representative.”²⁷⁰

Avon’s explicit double standards, combined with the exclusion of minorities from the commercial beauty market, catalyzed and sustained a thriving black owned and operated beauty industry. African American entrepreneurs, women such as Madam CJ Walker and Annie Turnbo, began their operations at roughly the same time that the California Perfume Company (later to become Avon) was founded in the early 1900s. Between 1900 and 1940, both black entrepreneurs developed their own lines of beauty and hair care systems that female agents sold door to door. But rather than solicit business from black women with marketing ploys and products promising to “fix” problems like kinky hair as white-owned companies did, Walker promoted her products as health aids designed to increase black women’s health and overall self esteem.²⁷¹ In 1932, another black entrepreneur, S. B. Fuller founded the Fuller Brush Company, a direct sales organization that employed over five thousand male and female sales agents, black and white, who sold personal and hair products door to door to white and black customers.²⁷² It seems the combination of discrimination and alienation from the mainstream beauty market, combined with entrepreneurialism and racial solidarity, made the black beauty and hair care companies some of the most lucrative and sustainable businesses during the period Juliet E.K. Walker designated the “golden era” of black business, 1900 – 1930.²⁷³ While there is evidence that women of color sold Avon and worked as city district sales managers in the early 1940s,

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 220

²⁷¹ Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press), 165.

²⁷² Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*, 297. Katina Manko also discusses difference between Fuller Brush’s business model that employed its primarily male sales staff on a full time basis under centralized corporate management as compared to Avon’s management that relied on part time representatives who were emotionally managed through motivational incentives. See Manko, “Ding Dong! Avon Calling,” 158.

²⁷³ Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*, 211 and 296. Walker also notes and when combined with sales from black-owned publishing industry, remained the only two areas of black entrepreneurship that produced goods exclusively for black consumers until the 1960s.

they remained absent from Avon's sales catalogues, recruitment literature, and national advertisements until the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁷⁴ Combined with hiring policies, Avon cultivated an image of the Avon Lady from its founding in 1886 to the early 1960s that framed the work of Avon representative and her symbolic resonance in American mass culture as a respectable "lady" firmly rooted in images and values associated with white, middle class living. The image of the Avon Lady in "Ding Dong! Avon Calling" television commercials helped cement this image in the collective imagination of Americans during the Cold War and reinforced by Avon's increasingly expansive public relations campaigns.

Like many industries that discriminated against black consumers in the twentieth century, early concepts of corporate responsibility did not address nor included economic racism, discrimination, or the exclusion of black consumers from their businesses. Despite this breach, African Americans have nonetheless utilized the collective power of their pocketbooks to organize consumer boycotts and to protest acts of white violence, discrimination, and discriminatory hiring practices.²⁷⁵ As Kathy Peiss's cultural history of the U.S. beauty industry illustrates, beauty culture has long served as a site of resistance precisely because racial politics, and discrimination converged. This is true given the intimate nature of personal grooming and beauty rituals, the objectification and display of women's physical bodies as symbols of a society's culturally inscribed norms and ideals of beauty, and the segmented marketing of mass

²⁷⁴ In 1961, Mrs. Lela Boykin of the City 754 Tennessee Southern Division became the first black woman to be named a district manager. See *Avon Essence* August 1961.

²⁷⁵ Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998.), 3. Weems makes the important distinction that boycotts were also used to protest acts of white violence, racist advertising campaigns, and to ostracize white companies whose primary interest in minorities was as consumers, rather than as employees.

produced cosmetics and hair care products to women according to class, race, and generational lines.²⁷⁶

Avon's investment in whiteness proved to be incredibly lucrative, especially during the United States post-war economic boom and suburban sprawl of the 1950s and 1960s. Avon recruitment brochures during this time represented the ideal Avon Lady as a middle class, friendly neighborhood woman who offered her clients personalized service in the comfort of their homes. A call from the Avon Lady operated both as a social cue and a social call for white suburban culture in America at this time.²⁷⁷ Avon's manager newsletters discussed the achievements of its non-white representatives, several of whom were appointed as the first minority female division managers in New York, Atlanta, and Iowa in districts.²⁷⁸

As pressure from the Civil Rights movement expanded educational and employment opportunities for African Americans, companies that had previously ignored or denied black business took notice of their increased earning power.²⁷⁹ By the 1960s, Civil Rights organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had forced many white-owned companies to incorporate black models in their advertising campaigns.²⁸⁰ Business, however, was not the only target of the movement. President Lyndon B. Johnson formulated the "Plan for Progress," a component of his War on Poverty, which saw private enterprise as a solution to problems of urban decay, unemployment, and racial strife.²⁸¹ President Johnson explained his

²⁷⁶ Kathy Lee Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).

²⁷⁷ Ibid.,1

²⁷⁸ *Avon Direct Line*, August and September, 1961.

²⁷⁹ Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*,3.

²⁸⁰ Susannah Walker, "Black Is Profitable: The Commodification of the Afro, 1960-1975." In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, edited by Philip Scranton, (New York: Routledge 2001,) 270.

²⁸¹ For more information see Gerhard Peters and John Woolley. "Talking Points of the President at a Luncheon for the National Alliance of Businessmen." In *President Lyndon B Johnson*, edited by American Presidency Project: University of California, Santa Barbara, 1968. For criticism of this approach and the implications it had black

rationale for turning to the private sector rather than investing in federal work programs by rationalizing that most American jobs were in the private sector; private enterprise provided more effective on the job training; and his conviction that "... American industry can do the job: It knows how to train people for the jobs on which its profits depend." In 1968, Avon joined Johnson's National Alliance of Businessmen, another federal program Johnson created to "encourage business industry to employ hardcore unemployables," a term the program designated for people from low income families who lacked steady employment, job skills, and/or belonged to minority groups.²⁸² Avon president Wayne Hicklin committed Avon to the program by agreeing to employ a "reasonable" number of minority "hardcore unemployables" and to provide them job counseling training, and opportunities for promotion, which Hicklin believed reflected Avon's corporate philosophy of economic uplift.²⁸³ Avon's involvement with the National Business Alliance and agreement to employ "hardcore" minorities highlights Avon's self-created image as a corporation responsible *for*, rather *to* African Americans.²⁸⁴

During this same time, Avon took its first steps towards publicly acknowledging the collective purchasing power of African American women. In so doing, it ran its first recruitment advertisement in a 1961 issue of *Ebony* magazine.²⁸⁵ *Ebony* magazine founder, John H. Johnson actively solicited advertising business from white corporations to support his magazine's growing readership. Between 1961 and 1973, Avon catered to *Ebony's* upper and middle class

business's access to federal loans, see Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*, 261. For example, Walker notes that Johnson's War on Poverty aimed to improve black employment through federal programs that operated under the auspices of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) rather than investing significant federal funds in black businesses, a process that ultimately relied on voluntary compliance by white-owned businesses and lacked specific enforcement provisions.

²⁸² In 1969, the National Business Alliance and Plans for Progress merged and operated in conjunction with the Federal Equal Opportunity. For information see, in John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2099>

²⁸³ "Procedural Bulletin on Avon's Plan for Progress," March, 1968, Series 1: Admin, Box 110.

²⁸⁴ Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 4.

²⁸⁵ *Avon Direct Line*, September 1961.

female readers with advertisements that touted Avon's personalized, at home service and feminine respectability.²⁸⁶ Taglines such as "The Art of being a Woman: An interest you and Your Avon Representative Share" ran below images of elegantly dressed black women in formal living rooms; the same backdrop of suburban tranquility and refinement Avon successfully developed for middle class white women in its famous "Ding Dong! Avon Lady Calling!" advertisements that ran from the late 1950s until the mid 1970s. Rather than generate separate creative concepts specifically for black women, Avon's advertisements in the 1960s and early 1970s mimicked those used in *Ladies Home Journals* and *McCall's* except the ads in *Ebony* featured black models to advertise "crossover" products like lipsticks and fragrances.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, black and white models appeared in "separate but equal" Avon product advertisements that reflected popular trends of the counterculture; psychedelic models danced for "Patterns" cosmetic line; posed in exoticized, mysterious Oriental backgrounds with *Elusive* perfume; and frolicked in flowing, pastoral gowns for Avon's *Sonnet* perfume. Other advertisements continued to tout Avon's personalized home service, despite the economic realities which required many black women to work outside their homes.²⁸⁷ Still, Avon's recruitment ads, featuring African American Avon Ladies and placed in *Ebony* and *Tuesday Morning*, spoke to a limited audience of black women whose cultural tastes, values, and lifestyle that Avon's ads expected minority women to emulate and relate.

²⁸⁶ This has generated a number of debates about the responsibility of the black press in profiting from advertising revenue that promoted whiteness as beauty ideal. For discussions on black newspapers in the 1920s, see Kathy Peiss "Shades of difference"; for discussion of more recent magazines like *Essence*, see Robert Weems's Chapter "Blaxploitation" in *Desegregating the Dollar*.

²⁸⁷ For information on racial and economic politics in black beauty salons see Tiffany Gill's "I Had My Own Business...So I Didn't Have to Worry": Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturalists, and the Politics of African-American Female Entrepreneurship." In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, edited by Philip Scranton, (New York: Routledge, 2001) 169-94.

By the 1970s, the Civil Rights movement and incremental advancements in federal hiring policies and school desegregation had refashioned American's understanding that race was an economic liability. As historian Eric Porter suggests, during the 1970s race increasingly became seen as a resource to be deployed for "...gains in some areas, missed opportunities in others, and marked the birth of diversity."²⁸⁸ Many corporations began to realize that excluding black consumers represented a significant loss of revenue, especially in cities where many blacks had successfully migrated and increased their earnings.²⁸⁹ Cosmetic and beauty trade journals and market research began highlighting the increased spending power of African American women, 54 percent of whom worked outside their homes in comparison to 38 percent of their married white counterparts. This increased purchasing power, combined with the historical context that personal grooming products developed in the black community, led market researchers in 1972 to estimate that black women "spent approximately 40 percent more of their disposable income on beauty and luxury items than did whites."²⁹⁰ The 1970s ushered in a decade where many white-owned cosmetics and hair care companies sought new ways to court black women whom they had previously degraded or disregarded, and many disavowed the "possessive investment in whiteness" for a more lucrative, multi-racial consumer base.²⁹¹

Avon also implemented several important changes in their product lines and their advertising during this era. Although the company had profited enormously from its white, middle class female sales force, by the early 1970s demographic shifts in income, birthrates, and employment trends forced Avon to expand its product development and marketing in the lucrative jewelry, fragrance, and teen markets. More importantly, it also recruited the services of

²⁸⁸ Eric Porter, "Affirming and Disaffirming Actions." In *America in the 1970s*, edited by Beth L. and David Farber Bailey (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 53.

²⁸⁹ Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 178.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 172.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 178.

D. Parke Gibson, a black-owned public relations firm that specialized in market research for black consumers and whose resume included work with Coke, Columbia Pictures, and RJ Reynolds.²⁹² Arlene Davila describes the process of soliciting the expertise of minority advertising and marketing experts as an “ethnic division of cultural labor” where management solicited what it perceived to be valuable insider knowledge about the desires of black women.

Avon believed that targeted ethnic marketing information would prove useful in developing new race conscious strategies. Gibson was charged with the task of presenting Avon with information the company could use to boost black sales. As Davilia’s work illustrates, the commodification of such ethnic knowledge reaffirms market research as a socially constructed practice that produces knowledges, definitions, and generalizations corporations use to determine what traits of a particular group “count.”²⁹³ At Avon the traits that “counted” for increasing their number of black consumers addressed the problems the company had recruiting and retaining minority sales representatives in urban and low income areas. The 1970 census, for instance, notes that 81 percent of the U.S. African American population resided in cities, compared to 72 percent of their white counterparts whose “flight” to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s had until then been the key to Avon’s tremendous financial success.²⁹⁴ Avon’s new attention to minorities in cities reflected America’s changing urban landscape in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the number of black families in low income areas rose by one-third while at the same time their wages decreased compared to their white counterparts.²⁹⁵ As a result, the mainstream media increasingly represented urban poverty as rooted in the demise of the black family rather than framing the discussion around economic restructuring, deindustrialization, and failed urban

²⁹² Ibid., 80.

²⁹³ Arlene Dâavila, *Latinos, Inc: The Marketing and Making of a People*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001,). 73.

²⁹⁴ Robert Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*, 80.

²⁹⁵ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 14.

renewal projects that benefited private banks and lenders instead of the black community.²⁹⁶

However, from Avon's perspective, minority women living and working in urban areas were viewed as a potentially lucrative segment of a newer, younger, and hipper generation of Avon Ladies who could supplement its aging, mostly white counterparts in the suburbs.

Gibson's research produced knowledge about black women that helped Avon refine its recruitment strategies it developed suburban housewives for representatives living and working in urban areas. Though Parke's research showed that while demand for Avon products was high, it also showed that representatives in urban areas often possessed limited book-keeping and clerical experience and demonstrated problems with the mechanics of money collection and ordering. To address these racial, educational, and class divides, Avon created a separate training program in 1972 for representatives working in low income areas. New training brochures featured brown-skinned Avon customers and illustrated the bureaucratic steps of filling and delivering orders. The instructions included graphic pictures and minimal text. Avon also divided the fees a new representative was expected to make into two separate payments (\$3.50 on the first order, \$5 at the second). This accommodation made start-up cheaper for women in low income neighborhoods to start their own Avon business.²⁹⁷ Avon supplemented its training literature with brochures like the "Personalized Beauty From Avon" booklet that provided tips on hair care, grooming, and Avon beauty products best suited for minority consumers. As the black pride movement increasingly advocated that African Americans embrace aesthetic fashions that reflected their ethnic heritage, Avon's brochures warned black consumers of the dangers associated with straightening their hair and instead recommended that "If hair is worn in a

²⁹⁶ Ibid.,15

²⁹⁷ Unlike their white counterparts, representatives received additional product samples and call back brochures new representatives were usually expected to purchase out of pocket, along with a free dram of perfume as an incentive to attend group training meetings with district managers. See "Procedural Bulletin #24, Avon Calling Series for Low Income Markets." January 2, 1970, RG II, Series 5: Reps and Sales Managers, Box 120.

“natural” or “Afro” hair style, it will probably be in better condition.”²⁹⁸ African-American models in Avon’s catalogs and beauty books wore their hair in a variety of styles, including “Afros” which Avon deemed to be more natural and healthy alternative then straightening.

While Avon never announced its low income training program publicly, it is clear from the images of brown skinned Avon representatives and consumers in its brochures that “low income” served as a corporate euphemism for the black, Latina, and other non-white women Avon had previously ignored or discriminated against as customers and representatives. Drawing on the paternal management strategies it employed in the 1950s and 1960s, Avon attempted to remedy this exclusion by revising its territory assignments to accommodate city living; replacing traditional Avon showcase kits with a tote-bag to reduce theft; and hiring more male managers to work in high crime areas.²⁹⁹ Meanwhile Avon’s branch offices, manufacturing, and distribution plants continued employing “hardcore unemployables” through its voluntary participation in the National Business Alliance. As such, Avon’s approach to black consumers from the late 1960s and early 1970s tended to view minority populations either as future Avon representatives in untapped urban markets or as impoverished persons in need of job training and economic uplift.

PUSHing Avon’s Corporate Responsibility

Corporations in the 1970s were not the sole advocates of race based economics; Civil Rights activists who championed equal rights and desegregation in the 1960s increasingly chose the marketplace to champion racial economic equality. Reverend Jesse Jackson’s grassroots organization, People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), emerged as one of the most vocal critics

²⁹⁸ “Personalized Beauty From Avon,” RG II, Series 4: Selling Methods/Sales Aids, 1972, Box 118.

²⁹⁹ “Procedural Bulletin: CSR Plan: Field Operations,” March, 1973, RG II, Series 1: Box 110.

of white-owned businesses. PUSH targeted Fortune 500 companies that earned sizeable profits from black consumers yet failed to reinvest their earnings in black businesses or to promote and hire a proportionate number of black employees.³⁰⁰ By the early 1970s, PUSH had successfully negotiated voluntary agreements with Schlitz Beer, General Foods, Miller Brewer Company, and Quaker Oats.

For this reason, PUSH noticed Avon's strategic and successful recruitment of minority women and newfound attention to consumers in urban markets. In a 1973 *Black Enterprise* editorial, Reverend Jackson noted that while Avon had taken a "substantially constructive approach in its relationship to blacks and other nonwhites," significant gaps remained between its sizeable profits and the number of non-white officials, managers, and professionally classified minorities it employed. In 1973 Avon's upper level management signed a covenant with PUSH agreeing to meet targeted minority employment benchmarks; to increase Avon's advertising in black markets; and to reinvest a reasonable portion of profit into black-owned banks and insurance companies. As a response to Jackson's editorial in the *Dialogue* section of *Black Enterprise*, Avon President David Mitchell defended Avon's history of minority outreach programs and policies but also acknowledged that 10-15 percent of Avon's profits were generated by minority consumers. Still, he agreed with Jackson "that these and other communities should have the opportunity to share equitably in the benefits of our business."³⁰¹

Between Operation PUSH's nudging and the independent, strategic, changes Avon initiated with its Corporate Social Responsibility Plan the previous year, Avon balanced its

³⁰⁰ Joel Dreyfuss, "Where Is Jesse Jackson Going," *Black Enterprise*, Oct., 1974, 23-27.

³⁰¹ David Mitchell, "Dialogue: Push and Avon." *Black Enterprise*, 1973, 42. Avon defined "minority" as black, Spanish speaking or surnamed, Oriental, Indian, and Eskimo on p. 2 of the CPR's "Minority Vendor Development Manual." In the spirit and theory of reading "along the archival grain," my usage of the word "minority" draws from Avon's explanation, despite the obvious limitations and exclusion of other ethnic groups and identities.

profits with a number of changes in its minority employment and hiring policies. Between 1972-1973, Avon's purchasing department expanded its percentage of minority-owned suppliers to 12 percent and contracted with an additional twenty-five minority owned banks to serve Avon's branch offices throughout the United States.³⁰² Avon also extended its relationship with minority recruiters and agencies; began advertising for full-time, professional positions in minority magazines; and actively sought out alliances with community and government organizations dedicated to racial progress. Avon's upper level management attended a racial awareness seminar that included an African-American history lessons and a group discussion on the movie "Black Anger." By the time Mitchell drafted his *Black Enterprise* editorial in 1973, he was proud to announce Avon's ongoing investment of "major corporate resources to ensure nonwhite communities receive an equitable share of Avon's success."³⁰³

Operation PUSH literally pushed Avon to reevaluate its reinvestment and profit-sharing policies. This change marked a significant shift from Avon's historical position as a paternal company *responsible for* economic uplift to a socially-aware company *responsible to* minority community concerns. PUSH's demand that Avon create advertisements specifically for black consumers emerged as one of the most significant changes to Avon's public image, marking a shift from the corporate persona rooted in white femininity. In 1973, Avon increased its minority advertising budget to \$300,000 and allocated an additional \$50,000 for minority public relations campaigns.³⁰⁴ After much debate, Avon executives agreed to a request made by their social audit team to hire a black-owned and operated agency to market to African American

³⁰² Ibid., 23.

³⁰³ David Mitchell, "Dialogue: Push and Avon, 42. An estimated 35,000 black women worked as Avon representatives, constituting approximately twelve percent of its domestic sales force, along with approximately two hundred full-time black district managers and several Black Division Managers, although it is unclear as to what Avon considered "several".

³⁰⁴ Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the color line : African Americans in the advertising industry*. (Philadelphia, PA., University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

consumers. The hiring of this new firm signaled a major change in Avon's assimilation-based advertising campaigns devised by its long-time advertising agency, Ogilvy and Mather, whose marketing concepts framed Avon's products and services around the desires and values of white women.

In August of 1974, armed with advice and a recommendation from PUSH, Avon hired Uniworld Group, a black owned advertising agency based in Atlanta, Georgia, that specialized in promotional activities and advertising for minority consumers. Some of Uniworld's most memorable marketing campaigns included the 1972 hit movie *Shaft*, as well campaigns for Kodak, Ford, AT& T, and Kraft.³⁰⁵ Advertising executives at Uniworld knew that although many black consumers were aware of direct-selling as a result of well-established, successful black-owned companies like Madam CJ Walker's and the S.B. Fuller Company, Avon's advertisements framed its at home, personalized service within a discourse of white women's cultural values and lifestyle.³⁰⁶ According to Jason Chamber's historical survey of black advertising agencies, by the 1970s, "agency executives were increasingly told that black consumers wanted to see unique representations that reflected knowledge in blacks' lifestyle, culture, and aspirations."³⁰⁷ Uniworld set out to reframe the "Avon Lady" in the language, settings, and cultures of black urban life. Its first major advertisement in *Essence* featured a generationally diverse set of black women posing above the tagline "Your Avon Representative Will be calling soon. Do Welcome her" while another declared: "Someone you know sells

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 238.

³⁰⁶ "Black Advertising: National Black Advertising: 1961, 1966-1973," RG I: Archive, Series 7: Advertising, Subseries A: Black Advertising, Box OS-37. These ads ran in *Tuesday at Home*, *Black Monitor*, *Dawn*, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Jet*, etc. and had a combined circulation over 7, 571,000. Also see, 1974-1978 :National Black Advertising by Uniworld Group, 1974-1978," RG I Series 7, Subseries A: Advertising Scrapbooks, Box OS-39.

³⁰⁷ The practice of representing racial integration in advertising for consumer goods was pervasive in the 1960s; however, the advent of the black power movement caused many companies to reevaluate their faith in assimilation-based advertising campaigns. See Jason Chambers Chapter 4 "Affirmative Action and the Search for White Collars" in *Madison Avenue and the Color Line*.

Avon... That's not surprising. Many thousands of black women are Avon ladies. An Avon lady is your sister, your mother, etc.”³⁰⁸

While Uniworld introduced the Avon Lady to black consumers, Avon continued its research and development efforts. A year later, the company unveiled a new product line designed specifically for black consumers with the proclamation: “You asked for special products for your hair, your skin, your make up needs. Avon listened and presents five new products.” Avon's products included hair straighteners and conditioner; body lotion for “dry, ashy skin;” and foundation designed for darker skin tones. According to its new brochure, “There are so many beautiful shades of dark skin in all nationalities and races. And Avon has make-up for all of them.”³⁰⁹ Uniworld supported Avon's new line with radio, television, and print advertisements in black media outlets using models, voiceovers, scenery, and music that represented Uniworld's vision of the 1970s urban black experience. Kids jumped rope outside row houses and greeted their Afro wearing neighborhood Avon Lady as the narrator announced that she “has pride and confidence because she knows she has the best products available.”³¹⁰ Meanwhile, radio spots in 43 markets targeted black women and men with the tagline, “If you don't know Avon, you should.”

Uniworld reversed the concept originally crafted and carefully maintained by Avon executives throughout the 1950s and 1960s, that an Avon Lady was a respectable, suburban white woman.³¹¹ For its part, Avon supported Uniworld's advertisements with new corporate

³⁰⁸ A variation of these ads ran in other minority and women's magazines and featured a racially diverse set of Avon ladies, in addition to reminding female readers that “There's more to Avon than you think” RG I, Series 7: Public Affairs, 1973-1976: Institutional Advertising/ Black PR Advertising, Box OS-48.

³⁰⁹ “National Black Advertisements by Uniworld Group and Friends,” August 13, 1974. RG I: Archives, Series 7: Advertising, Subseries A: Advertising scrapbooks, Box OS-39.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

policies that mandated a proportionate number of black models be represented in all sales brochures and corporate literature and that black modeling agencies, photographers, and suppliers be used as well. Avon's recruiting literature and national advertisements now included an ensemble of Caucasian, light-skinned, and dark skinned models, along with Asian or Hispanic models and reflected a general shift in the 1970s within the beauty, fashion, and personal care industries that began representing ethnically diverse models in the mass media.³¹²

Like the outreach programs designed to combat criticisms of the consumer rights movements, Avon's public relations office emerged as the primary vehicle to drive home Avon's progressive, racially inclusive corporate persona to minority consumers. This office ensured that Avon contributed to a variety of charitable organizations supportive of racial integration and black entrepreneurship, including the NAACP, the United Negro College Fund, and college scholarship programs for minority students.³¹³ More importantly, Avon's minority outreach public relations events, like its sponsorship of the 1975 Miss Black America Pageant, provided Avon free publicity.³¹⁴ Avon's attention to its minority corporate image resulted in the creation of a new, "multiracial soul," to borrow Roland Marchand's phrase, supported by the expanded involvement of the minority affairs branch of its public relations department.³¹⁵ By 1975, Avon

³¹² Despite these positive steps, white models still dominated magazine covers, fashion catwalks, and white-owned cosmetics companies still spent the majority of their advertising revenue targeting white women. In 1967, *Mademoiselle* magazine featured its first racially diverse set of makeovers for female readers, a merchandising strategy Avon did not use until 1975 when it published its comprehensive "how-to" beauty guide, *The Beautiful You Book*, whose collective "you" now included women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and advised them how to care for their individual skin and hair needs, as well as offering foundations, lipsticks, and eye shadow in a range of colors. For discussion of America's changing beauty culture in the 1960s and 1970s, see Kathy Peiss's chapter "Identity and the Market" in *Hope in a Jar* and "Avon Beauty Book: The Beautiful You Book," 1975. RG II: Historical Files, Series 5: Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 118:

³¹³ In 1977, Avon elected its first African American, and only the second female, to its board of directors. Although most of its public relations advertisements focused on the black community, Avon also supported Hispanic events, including Casita Maria Bicentennial Fiesta in 1976. See Public Affairs, 1973-1976/ Institutional Advertising/ Black PR Advertising, Box OS-48.

³¹⁴ At the time, Mrs. Ernesta Procope served as the president of E.G. Bowman, Co., Inc, the largest black-owned insurance brokerage firm in the country.

³¹⁵ Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*.

had successfully repositioned itself as a racially diverse company that offered employment opportunities, beauty products, and supported philanthropic causes for minority women.

Avon's transition from a corporation built upon the profitable symbolic imagery of whiteness to a multi-cultural, racially inclusive corporation marked the beginning of what scholars have described (and then later critiqued) as an era of multiculturalism. This era produced cultural entertainment in the form of television shows and movies, and thus, like Avon, advertisers strategically used racially diverse cast members to appeal to a cross-section of ethnically diverse audiences.³¹⁶ The shift to multiculturalism which spawned the later move to "colorblindness," or the inclusive or "non" ethnic identity in the United States, generated heated debates amongst scholars.³¹⁷ Cultural critics and historians have documented the historical origins and contemporary consequences of "colorblindness" in a variety of contexts. Feminist critic bell hooks argues that commodifying ethnic-specific cultural forms encourages the commodification and consumption of black cultural form and erases historically black political, economic, and social struggles.³¹⁸ Yet, establishing a "racially diverse soul" as Avon demonstrated was not all bad for the black community. It required expanded, aggressive public relations campaigns to be sure, but it also entailed soliciting marketing and advertising expertise from within the black community.

³¹⁶ See Eric Porter, "Affirming and Disaffirming Actions." In *America in the 1970s*, and Chapter 2, "E Pluribus Plures: From Racial Integration to 'Diversity' in Bruce Schulman's, *The Seventies : The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Free Press, 2001.

³¹⁷ Michael Omi and Howard Winant's book provides an especially lucid account of the emergence of colorblindness in the 1980s as an extension from racial politics of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Omi and Winant, a "color-blind" society is one "...where racial considerations were never entertained in the selections of leaders, in hiring decisions, and the distribution of goods and services in general," which by the 1970s, the political right began to articulate and as a form of preferential treatment. See Chapter 7, "Race and Reaction."

³¹⁸ bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 21-39: South End Press, 1992.

For many reasons then, these critiques and dismissal of multiculturalism need to be complicated further. When combined with the policies and protocol Avon devised in the 1970s to end work place discrimination, the company's history of multicultural advertising and recruiting efforts offers a more complex reading of the multicultural corporate image. This process worked in two directions. Rather than merely co-opting the urban black experience for white consumption or exploiting minority models to target black consumers, Avon's management also provided much need employment opportunities by hiring black professionals to develop Avon's new, racially diverse image. Though not uncontested nor completely altruistic, the practice does illustrate how Avon's social audit team convinced Avon's upper level management of the potential profits of employing black media outlets, models, and newspapers.³¹⁹ The final decision to give Uniworld the creative license to represent both Avon and the needs of black consumers marked a major shift in Avon's politics of representation. It also gave minorities the power to control their representations in the public sphere.³²⁰ As the President and Founder of Uniworld Byron Lewis recently stated, "So what does an ethnic agency do? Our job, from a commercial point of view, is to communicate advertising messages to consumers they think have an economic value to them. The mainstream agencies don't see it that way...We're the primary conduit of the kind of information, the positive values, the ways we would like to see ourselves in society."³²¹ And while many white companies ended their relationship with minority advertising agencies after they reached their target goals, Avon'

³¹⁹ "Harvard Case Study, Avon Takes Study," 1973. RG II, Series1: Box 110.

³²⁰ This is also a departure from stereotypes of African Americans that have been deployed as sources of racial humor, degradation or sources of "authentic" black culture in mainstream advertising throughout American history, as noted in Fath Ruffins,. "Reflecting No Ethnic Imagery in the Landscape of Commerce, 1945-1975." In *Getting and Spending: European and American Societies in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Susan Strasser McGovern Charles, and Matthias Judt,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 379-406.

³²¹ Fath Ruffins, Bernadette Calafell, William O'Barr, Jack Tchen, Zan Ng, Jennifer Mack. "Roundtable Issue: Conversations About Race and Ethnicity in Advertising." *Advertising Society and Review* 6, no. 2 (2005)..

retained Uniworld's services for future advertising and public relations campaigns, like its 1986 sponsorship of the Statue of Liberty Makeover.³²²

Although Avon's commercial marketing of its new image was paramount to its efforts to reframe its corporate image, Avon's real marketing muscle and power came from the individual sales representatives whose personal relationships and direct contact with customers serve as the human face of Avon. Despite its massive and successful public relations and marketing campaigns to rebrand itself as a multicultural company, the diversity of Avon's sales force provides a better view of its newfound investment in multiculturalism. By 1973, an estimated 35,000 black women worked as Avon representatives, constituting approximately twelve percent of its domestic sales force, along with approximately two hundred full-time black district managers and several Black Division Managers.³²³ Avon had not simply changed its form, it made substantive contributions to black employment and representation.

Nor can these critiques of multiculturalism explain Avon's alliance with Operation PUSH. Their relationship complicates the multiculturalism narrative that suggests the commodification of the spirit and imagery of the Civil Rights movement for corporate gain did not represent any tangible progress. Just as advertising scholar, Thomas Frank, has argued that the youthful spirit of the counterculture influenced and changed the internal culture of the advertising business and produced a "hip consumerism" in advertisements, the Civil Rights movement had a similar impact on black marketing and employment at Avon. Here, Operation PUSH and the ethnic pride movement influenced Avon's internal business culture as it adopted

³²² Avon may have retained Uniworld for other campaigns but it is difficult to ascertain given scattered evidence in the archive. For a discussion of Avon and Uniworld's working relationship see Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line: African Americans in the Advertising Industry*. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 238.

³²³ It is unclear as to what Avon considered "several" when describing the number of division managers.

minority hiring benchmarks, redistributed its resources to black-owned banks, and schooled its upper level managers in black U.S. history and culture. Avon's relationship with Uniworld and Operation PUSH repositioned Avon's corporate image to a more racially inclusive company, and provides a "behind the scenes" view of the complex processes, people, and organizations Avon recruited to help revamp its corporate image.

From its 1968 "Plans for Progress" and hiring of hardcore unemployables to its strategic use of African American market research and advertising agencies, Avon executives never concealed the profitable rewards of creating a corporate responsibility based on the commodification of diversity. Avon President David Mitchell made it clear in his *Black Enterprise* editorial that Avon would accommodate its moral obligation and "covenant" with Operation PUSH as long as it helped Avon meet "real business goals."³²⁴ These two aims were not mutually exclusive. A procedural bulletin elaborates Avon's rationale for including minority models in its corporate and sales literature, "Certainly, through the use of such things as minority group models and minority related advertising, we not only benefit the economy of largely disadvantaged black communities, but also appeal to this community as a significant and important marketing area." Economic uplift and social responsibility were both possible and profitable under Avon's new approach.

Avon's voluntary involvement with grass roots organizations, federal affirmative action programs, selective philanthropy, and the aid of African American marketing research and advertising specialists offer a complex history of Avon's "what's good for society is good for business "ideology." What are we to make of this mix of responsible but profitable business

³²⁴ David Mitchell, "Dialogue: Push and Avon." *Black Enterprise*, Nov., 1973. 42-43. PUSH's role in referring minority businesses to white-owned generated criticism and some accused the organization of benefitting from "sweetheart" deals in which company's associated with Jackson reaped the financial rewards of the covenants. For further reading see Joel Dreyfuss, "Where Is Jesse Jackson Going."

protocol? Within the business community and organizational management literature, Avon's corporate social responsibility policies have received numerous accolades and have been incorporated as case studies for business schools, including a 1973 Harvard Business School review that observed Avon always discussed corporate social responsibility as an investment, rather than as a risk.³²⁵ This underscores a key point: in 1971, Avon's profits exceeded the billion dollar mark for the first time in its company history.³²⁶ This was the same year that ethnic pride and consumer rights movements reached their peak in the U.S. public sphere. The intersection of these social movements combined with Avon's alliance with Operation PUSH, enabled the company to adopt "diversity" as a profitable and responsible business strategy. Thus, corporate responsibility was neither a risk nor a liability for Avon; it was a resource.

While Avon's relationship with Operation PUSH, Uniworld, and D. Parkes also allowed Avon to bypass criticisms launched at other white-owned cosmetics companies who actively pursued black consumers during this time, there were also significant drawbacks for black-owned beauty companies as a result.³²⁷ Black owned cosmetics and hair care companies, once one of the most profitable sources of black entrepreneurialism, faced increasing competition from white owned companies by the 1970s. In the 1960s, George Johnson's hair care company, Johnson Products, controlled 80% of the black hair product industry and was the first black business listed on the American Stock exchange in 1970.³²⁸ By the 1980s, competition from other black and white owned hair companies, financial mismanagement, and a battle against the

³²⁵ *Harvard Case Study*, RG II, Series 1: Admin, Administration: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, 14, Box 110. Specifically, it discusses how Avon's mixed motives for social responsibility (financial and ethical, selfish and altruistic) stemmed from Avon's financial security; support from upper level management; and the importance of public acceptance and customer satisfaction to Avon's business.

³²⁶ *Avon Annual Report*, 1971. RG I: Series 1: Admin, Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box1.

³²⁷ Robert Weems, "Consumerism and the Construction of Black Female Identity," *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. J. Scanlon. (New York: New York University Press, 2000,) 166-178 and Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*.

³²⁸ Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*.

Federal Trade Commission led to the eventual sale of Johnson Products to a white-owned and operated IVAX corporation. Black business historians note that while financial mismanagement is partially to blame for the demise of Johnson's empire, his fight against the FTC exemplifies the double standards black companies faced on the marketplace.³²⁹

Avon's belief that it could empower minority communities and simultaneously profit from them as a "significant and important marketing area" differed significantly from the ways black beauty culturalists have historically used the beauty market to advance black political, social, and economic solidarity. A number of scholars have documented how black beauty industrialists used their beauty and hair care businesses as opportunities to promote racial uplift in women's homes, outside the public sphere where black women often faced discrimination based on both their race and their gender.³³⁰ U.S beauty culture in the 1970s was also informed by racial politics as ethnic-inspired fashion, dress, and hairstyles increasingly served as signifiers of racial solidarity and pride. Yet as Susannah Walker notes, the small percentage of cosmopolitan black women who wore "Afros" as a political statement quickly saw the Afro turn into a fashion commodity by the 1970s. In particular, she argues this transition was facilitated by white-owned companies like Clairol and Avon that began marketing and manufacturing products specifically for black women's hair. Although Avon no doubt contributed to declining revenue of black beauty and hair care companies, it managed to avoid criticism from black consumer activists, especially given its alliance with Operation PUSH, who instead called

³²⁹ Johnson actively the FTC's claim that its hair straighteners failed to list "lye" as a dangerous ingredient, a stipulation that Johnson said the FTC failed to enforce for white-owned companies, like Revlon, who consequently used it as an opportunity to misleadingly promote the safety of its products to black consumers. See Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*, 306.

³³⁰ Tiffany Gill describes the dual economic and political roles Madam Carter and CJ Walker played as "black beauty industrialists." See Gill, "I Had My Own Business...So I Didn't Have to Worry": Beauty Salons, Beauty Culturalists, and the Politics of African-American Female Entrepreneurship." In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*. Also see Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 1996.

attention to companies like Revlon and Helene Curtis for appropriating patents, marketing techniques, and/or deceptive advertising to woo black consumers away from black owned beauty and hair care companies.³³¹ Avon's relationship with these black professionals provided legitimacy to Avon's aggressive campaign and mediated the broader arena of race relations and responsible business practices.

In 1975, as Avon unveiled its hair care and beauty products for black consumers, diversity had become part of Avon's codified corporate responsibility statement, its public relations campaigns, and the marketing strategies used to recruit a new generation of minority representatives from urban neighborhoods. In many of the critiques of multiculturalism and colorblindness of commercial cultural forms like advertisements, little has been written about the internal culture, processes, and protocol that shaped corporations' workplace diversity policies or the public relations campaigns designed to sell them to the public. It is clear that pressures of black pride movement catalyzed Avon to reevaluate its social policies and programs. To address concerns in the consumer right movement, Avon joined forces with consumer advocates and government agencies to educate the public about product ingredients and safety, while also forging alliances within the direct selling industry to promote its virtues as a legitimate sales technique. Avon's newly minted "Government and Public Affairs Department" assumed most of the responsibility for administering these public outreach programs, including expanding its relationship with public high schools that provided a captive audience for Avon to tap into concerns, desires, and tastes of future consumers.

³³¹ Robert Mark Silverman, "Black Business, Group Resources, and the Economic Detour: Contemporary Black Manufacturers in Chicago's Ethnic Beauty Aids Industry " *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 2 (1999): 232-58.

Avon's response to the consumer rights movement paled in comparison to the efforts it launched to address issues of workplace discrimination. Avon disregarded, segregated, and ignored black consumers a majority of its eighty-year history. By the 1970s, however, the company began the process of reversing its corporate policies and altering an image rooted in whiteness to redirect its efforts to recruit minority representatives from low income, urban areas. It was not until Avon's relationship with Operation PUSH in 1973 that Avon took responsibility for this successful venture and reinvested a portion of its profits in minority businesses. With Uniworld's help, Avon generated advertisements to reflect black urban living in the early 1970s; expanded its minority public relations campaigns; and included minority models in its corporate promotional and recruitment literature. Together, these strategies repositioned Avon's corporate image to a socially responsible and progressive company attune to changing racial climate in the United States and the increasing economic power of black consumers..

Historian Richard Tedlow argues that the expanded role of corporation's public relations departments illustrates companies' insecurities about their degree of power and influence in society, a tentative acknowledgement that their business practices are ultimately subject to society's prevailing and ever evolving social attitudes, values, and opinions.³³² Even if Avon was insecure about changing social landscape and race relations in the United States during the early 1970s, by 1972 it was also financially secure and forward-thinking enough to invest in diversity training, outreach programs, and marketing campaigns directed at minority and teenage consumers. As a result, multi-culturalism emerged as the cornerstone of Avon's new corporate image, an investment and a resource that Avon would draw on in its future global branding and public relations campaigns. But as next chapter shows, not all social movements of the 1970s

³³² Richard Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image : Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950*, Industrial Development and the Social Fabric ; V. 3. (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1979).

were created equal as Avon struggled to continue motivating and managing its female sales representatives and employees in a decade where women's increasing presence in the workforce challenged the tried and true sales methods and global appeal of the Avon Lady.

“Fashion made our lady wonder and worry –forced her to alter her idea of what’s right and wrong, proper and improper, bold or demur, feminine or sexy.”

-Avon Product Marketing Overview, March 1970 ³³³

Chapter 5: Managing Domestic Dissent Liberating the Avon Lady 1970-1986

In 1970 Avon Product Managers convened to prepare for the changes the 1970s would pose to American women.³³⁴ They worried and wondered how technical, cultural, and demographic changes underway in the US--the newly available birth control pill, the realities of racial integration, and the increasing number of women entering the workplace--would impact the beauty industry. Avon’s managers were keenly aware that women were not only reading Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique*, but taking their protests to the streets and the workplace. Despite these changes, managers comforted themselves by stating, “Yet while the thunder of change crashed about the American woman—there were still threads of consistency—at the core of her life.”³³⁵ Even though the market research they cited showed otherwise, Avon’s Product Managers still predicted that by 1975 most of their female customers would still be “...shopping at Sears and Woolworth’s, and the A&P, watching soap operas and Ed Sullivan, half-heartedly watching football and baseball along with their men—and asserting their femininity with fragrances, make-up, and skin care products.”³³⁶

The expectation that many American women would continue to assert their femininity by purchasing beauty and personal care products was one of the truisms espoused by Avon in a decade that posed radical challenges and new opportunities for women in the United States.

Avon’s Product Managers correctly predicted that many American women would continue to

³³³ “Product Marketing: 5-Year Overview Conference Transcript, March 1970.” RG I: Archive, Series 8, Subseries B: Product Marketing; Box 65, 2.

³³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³³⁵ Ibid., 5.

³³⁶ Ibid., 2.

purchase cosmetics as part of their feminine identity. However, Avon's expectation that women would be home to answer the calls of their neighborhood Avon Ladies and their ability to recruit new women posed a serious problem for Avon in the 1970s. The economic turbulence of the 1970s compounded these changes, especially given the increasing number of women entering the workforce. According to women's historian Beth Bailey, the economic crisis of the early 1970s and the increasing number of women who sought work outside their homes for economic necessity had as much, if not more, influence than women's liberation activists on shaping the ways men and women came to understand shifting gender roles and social mores for women in the United States. Bailey argues that many of these conflicting ideologies were played out – and reconciled – in the marketplace as much as the political realm, helping blur the notion of men and women's separate spheres in American public life.³³⁷

As a company that successfully navigated, and capitalized on, the blurry boundaries between women's private and public lives, the economic and social turmoil of the 1970s created a number of challenges for Avon. The image of refined domesticity Avon had so carefully crafted and maintained during the 1950s and 1960s emblemized the very lifestyle and social constraints many women vociferously protested during the 1970s, while economic recessions, inflation, and an increasing number of women with full time jobs limited Avon's recruitment pool. How did Avon reconcile women's calls for increased access to political, social, and economic institutions given its entrenched history and reliance on women in the domestic sphere? Did women's liberation influence Avon's recruitment strategies or the corporate persona Avon crafted for this new decade? Did calls for economic and social equality shift the gendered and sexed policies of Avon's corporate culture? To answer these questions, the first

³³⁷ Beth Bailey, "She 'Can Bring Home the Bacon'." In *America in the 1970s*, edited by Beth L. and David Farber Bailey, 107-28. (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 100.

part of this chapter examines Avon's recruitment literature as it adapted to the increasing number of women working outside their homes. The second section examines the limitations Avon's female executives faced within Avon's paternal corporate structure and the degree to which Avon acknowledged and redressed sex-based hiring and promotion policies.

Refashioning the Avon Lady for a New Decade

Avon entered the 1970s with the highest profits in its 84-year history, and by 1972 Avon had netted over one billion dollars in profits.³³⁸ Its sales quadrupled between 1960 and 1969, and by 1971 Avon possessed 14% of the cosmetics market in the United States. Almost half of the perfumes purchased in the United States were Avon brands, while over 555,000 representatives around the world sold an expanding line of products that ranged from hair care to costume jewelry.³³⁹ Avon executives poised themselves for a decade of continued prosperity, despite the winds of change stirring in homes around the country. Wall Street analysts predicted that unlike other industries that relied on primarily on female consumers, beauty and personal care companies could continue to count on women's purchasing dollars to keep them afloat, even during periods of inflation and economic instability. Women might forgo purchasing designer dresses or shoes during economic straits, but by 1970, cosmetics and toiletry items had evolved from luxury products into essential goods in the United States and other parts of the developed world.³⁴⁰

Although Avon was prepared for women to "assert" their femininity by continuing to purchase cosmetics and toiletry products, it was not nearly as prepared when American women

³³⁸ "Avon and You;" Box 118: RG II, Historical Files, Series 4: Selling Methods/Sales Aids, July/August 1970.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ "Avon and You" excerpted from David McClintick from Wall Street Journal., no date nor year cited. RG II, Historical Files, Series 4: Selling Methods/Sales Aids, July/August 1970, Box 118.

began organizing themselves to protest sexism, discrimination, and inequality in their public and private lives.³⁴¹ The women's liberation movement grew increasingly visible and vocal during the early 1970s while Avon continued to market itself as a respectable way for women to earn money without disrupting their domestic lives or responsibilities. Recruitment advertisements communicated many of the same messages Avon utilized during the 1950s and described representative as a "friendly, neighborhood woman who wants to earn money in a pleasant and dignified manner."³⁴² Despite this provincial approach, there were some noticeable changes to the Avon Lady in the early 1970s. Multi-racial and generational models appeared in Avon's recruitment and training brochures, and by the time it implemented its 1972 Corporate Social Responsibility plan, minority women represented over ten percent of the models in Avon's printed materials. It also regularly printed Spanish language newsletters and advertisements for its Spanish speaking representatives.³⁴³

The hallmark of at-home sales, what Avon Vice President called an "impregnable citadel," was undergoing extensive changes as women entered the workforce and found new ways to earn money. Avon also encountered competition from a number of direct-selling organizations, including Mary Kay that began encroaching on Avon's exclusive domain as the only direct selling company that catered to women.³⁴⁴ Operating without any direct competitors,

³⁴¹ In the early 1970s, women of all age, class, and political spectrums began organizing themselves across America and gearing up for a number of highly publicized debates and protests. A broad range of feminist scholarship, especially women's labor history, explore different grievances, alliances, and concerns that shaped women's organizing efforts in the early 1970s. For a general overview of the race and class divides that shaped various factions of women's movement see Chapter 13, "The Politicization of Personal Life" in Sara Evans *Born for Liberty*. For discussion of issues of equal pay in the 1970s see Chapter 4 & 5 in Alice Kessler-Harris's *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*, The Blazer Lectures. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1990).

³⁴² 1969 Outlook, Campaign #3, RG I: Series 6: Sales Promotion, Subseries C: "Outlook, 1965-1974," Box 35.

³⁴³ 1970 Outlook, Campaign #2, RG I: Series 6: Sales Promotion, Subseries C: "Outlook, 1965-1974," Box 35.

³⁴⁴ Mary Kay employed an At-Home party system that differed from Avon's approach of calling on individual customers repeatedly. Meanwhile, other DSOs like Amway utilized multi-level marketing approaches. See Biggart-Woolsey, *Charismatic Capitalism*, 4.

Avon Ladies canvassed an incredibly high number of homes across the United States. To stymie the problem of market penetration in 1971 Avon introduced a two-week selling cycle (as opposed to a four week cycle) to offer consumers more chances to purchase Avon's expanding range of products. Avon's biggest challenge rested with the increasing number of women who began entering the paid workforce. Improved working conditions posed problems for direct sales organizations that relied on women in need of part-time, flexible work. Nicole Woolsey Biggart notes:

The economic health of the direct selling industry depends in large part on the exclusionary, discriminatory, and rationalized character of modern work settings. DSOs [direct selling organizations] have prospered because they provide an alternative environment for work that many people, especially women, find attractive. As one industry executive put it, the greatest threat to direct selling is the improvement of working conditions for women in firms.³⁴⁵

By 1972, the U.S. Department of labor estimated that over fifty percent of women aged 18-64 were in the labor force, nearly half working for economic need rather than "pin" money. Many of these first time workers were married women who supplemented their family's income, rather than single or widowed women who historically have participated in paid labor market.³⁴⁶ The increasing number of women who worked full time jobs outside the home limited the number of women Avon could enlist as new recruits, while existing representatives found an more and more doors unanswered on their sales calls. These "not-at-homes" were cause for serious concern.³⁴⁷ Avon attempted to reconcile this dilemma by encouraging representatives to use

³⁴⁵ Ibid.,11.

³⁴⁶ "Are Male Workers More Equal than Female Workers? No!," U.S Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, July 1972. RG: II, Series "Admin: Policies/Women in Management," Box 110. For an in-depth analysis of how this trend impacted increasing numbers of women drawn to direct sales in the 1970s see Chapter 3, "Changing Conditions of Work" in Woolsey-Biggart's *Charismatic Capitalism*, 53.

³⁴⁷ "Building Your Earnings with Avon: Training Step 3: Adding Customers," RG II: Historical Files; Series 5: Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120.

the phone to set up appointments.³⁴⁸ Other creative suggestions included telling representatives to leave call back brochures and visiting with neighbors to learn their customers' schedules.³⁴⁹ Recruitment and training materials still positioned selling Avon as a service that catered to busy housewives, but Avon's representative newsletter, *Outlook*, began recognizing the potential of a new kind of customer: the working mom. As one 1973 article notes, "It's worth an extra effort to reach the not at homes because working people are the very ones who buy and use lots of cosmetics you sell. Working people also have more money to spend and less time to shop. They appreciate your time saving service."³⁵⁰

While Avon grappled with the increasing number of women joining the paid labor force, it also had to address the cumulative effect various factions of the women's liberation movement had on American social life. Unlike the aggressive strategies it took to redress and capitalize on ethnic pride movements, Avon's response to women's increasingly vocal call for equal pay, access to America's political and social institutions, and protests against normative standards of beauty, fell on deaf ears at Avon. Avon's decision to bypass creative advertising concepts that spoke to youth rebellion in the late 1960s may have worked in the short term, but by the 1970s, the women's liberation movement had infiltrated all aspects of American life with the help of the mass media. Nightly television news broadcast the women's movement to homes across the United States and Susan Douglas notes that "...the entertainment media were trying to figure out how to capitalize on feminism while containing it."³⁵¹ Movies and television shows in the mid

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ 1973 Outlook, Campaign #2, RG I: Series 6: Sales Promotion, Subseries C: "Outlook, 1965-1974," Box 35.

³⁵¹ For analysis of mainstream news coverage of women's liberation movement see Beth Bailey, "She Can Bring Home the Bacon" and Chapter 13, "The Politicalization of Personal Life" in Sara Evans *Born for Liberty*. In Chapter 9, "The Rise of the Bionic Bimbo," Douglas analyzes representations and critical debates that range from news coverage, popular television shows like *Mary Tyler Moore* and the disappearance of women from major

1970s represented women's clamor for political and economic equality as an extension of otherworldly superpowers (*The Bionic Woman*), the result of their irresistible good looks or sex appeal (*Charlie's Angels*), or a combination of both (*Wonder Woman*). Women's magazines published a range of commentary and features about women's fight for equality. Some, like *Redbook*, emerged as an outspoken champion and supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972. Others, like *The Ladies Home Journal*, found themselves the target of women's liberation activists who protested what they saw as the magazine's endless promotion of self-help advice, and "how to" features that framed women as mindless consumers and homemakers.³⁵² The fact that the *Ladies Home Journal* succumbed, at least temporarily, to the demands of activists, illustrates the degree to which the mass media, and one of its primary supporters, the beauty industry, was forced to acknowledge its influence in perpetuating limited and often unattainable representations of female beauty.³⁵³

By the 1970s, beauty culture in the United States was increasingly marked by women who began using less make-up and embraced a more natural look. Many companies responded with new products and advertisements that emphasized health and well-being instead of sex appeal and allure.³⁵⁴ However, Avon was slower to respond than others, and watched in surprise as its main retail competitor, Revlon, capitalized on women's desire to celebrate their independence with the successful launch of its jaunty, new fragrance *Charlie*. *Charlie's* long-legged, pant-clad models strode confidently and defiantly across the pages of women's

Hollywood films with the rise of buddy blockbusters like *Easy Riders* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. See Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 193.

³⁵² Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*. New York, London: Free Press ;Collier Macmillan, 1989., 287. In Chapter 13, "The Politicalization of Personal Life," Evan describes how a sit-in protest at the *LHJ* headquarters resulted in an eight page supplement that featured articles on sex discrimination, education, child-birth, divorce, and other issues that protestors penned for readers.

³⁵³ See Chapter 9, The Rise of the Bionic Bimbo in Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, and Chapter 8, "Identity and the Market" in Peiss's *Hope in a Jar*.

³⁵⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 262. Peiss notes that during this time many self-identified feminists and professional women were drawn to Clinique's brand of "asexual," scientific skin care.

magazines around the world, and helped launch the fragrance to the top of the market.³⁵⁵ Unlike *Charlie*, a 1974 advertising study by Ogilvy and Mather, confirmed that Avon's brand image was out of step with the changing times. While a small segment of Avon's customers were considered "loyal," the study showed that Avon needed to connect with a new generation of women who were more upscale and interested in cosmetics that would "enable her to achieve any look she wants."³⁵⁶ These women were less tied to their homes and families; they were less conservative than Avon's shrinking vanguard of suburban housewives; and they did not connect, nor seem particularly interested in, the beauty advice Avon's older saleswomen brought with them on their sales calls.

Avon responded to its faltering brand image in 1975 by creating a series of high-fashion beauty advice books and hiring former model Sunny Griffin as its in-house fashion and beauty expert.³⁵⁷ Even though it had ceased airing its iconic "Ding Dong!, Avon Calling" television advertisements in 1967, the memorable chimes of the doorbell still served as the backdrop for other Avon's television spots in the early 1970s.³⁵⁸ By 1975, it was clear that with fewer women at home, the doorbell served as an empty sound, and signifier, for many women. Avon replaced its iconic image and sound with Ogilvy and Mather's "Avon Never Looked so Good" campaign.³⁵⁹ Recruitment brochures exchanged the Avon Lady's trademarked pearl necklaces

³⁵⁵ For a discussion of how Revlon's Charlie advertising campaign both fit and challenged representations and sex appeal in women's advertising history, see Juliann Sivulka, "Historical and Psychological Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal in Advertising." In *Sex in Advertising: Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal*, edited by Tom and Jacqueline Lambiase Reichert, 39-64., (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 59.

³⁵⁶ "Avon Advertising and Development Study," Series 8: Marketing: Subseries A: Market Research and Development: Box 63).

³⁵⁷ "Avon Beauty Book: The Beautiful You Book", 1975. RG II: Historical Files, Series 4: Selling Methods/Sales Aids, Box 118.

³⁵⁸ Klepacki, *Avon: Building the World's Premier Company for Women*, 171.

³⁵⁹ From 1976-1977 Avon employed Ogilvy and Mather; from 1978-1980 it used the NW Ayer agency that created the tagline, "It's a Beautiful Way to Work." See Advertising Scrapbook, "Representative Enhancement Campaign, 1976-1980: RG I: Archives, Series 7: Advertising; Subseries A: Advertising Scrapbooks, Box OS-40. For video

and gloves with a decidedly professional looking ensemble of African-American and Caucasian Avon ladies positioned above the tagline: “We’ve opened new doors in our lives...want to join us?” The double entendre, combined with the model’s working woman attire of pantsuits and briefcases, implied that Avon Ladies had traded their pumps and living rooms for selling Avon and pursuing careers outside their homes. For the first time in its history, Avon used the word “work” to describe labor of selling Avon in a 1975 magazine advertisement where a young, white woman declared, “I never thought there were enough hours in the day to be a working woman and a mother, too. As an Avon Representative, I’m successful at both.” Selling Avon was no longer framed merely as a social responsibility and opportunity to serve women but was now a job. Other print advertisements broke similar long-standing Avon recruitment taboos, such as when Avon’s multi-racial and generationally diverse cast of models began including male sales representatives, one who proclaimed, “Avon doesn’t limit the amount you can sell and earn. I like that.” In case readers missed Avon’s commitment to equal employment for both sexes, an explanatory sidebar proclaimed, “Yes, We have Avon men, too.”³⁶⁰

Even at the peak of media coverage and public awareness of the women’s liberation movement in the mid 1970s, politically sensitive words like “feminism” and “liberation” remained conspicuously absent from Avon recruitment brochures and service advertisements. This could be attributed to the complex meanings and different associations the word “liberation” evoked in the 1970s. According to Beth Bailey, the term “liberation” created a complex dialogue in the public sphere that “invited comparisons.”³⁶¹ Some women and men associated women’s “liberation” with angry protesters while others associated it with being

footage of Avon’s television commercials, see “Avon Calling: Composite of Avon Calling Ads, 1950-1980s,” Box 67.

³⁶⁰ “Representative Manual, 1976;” RG II: Historical Files; Series 5: Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120.

³⁶¹ Bailey, “She Can Bring Home the Bacon,” 111-112.

liberated from rigid sexual mores of heterosexual monogamy. For others, women's liberation simply meant that women had the right to work outside the home.³⁶² Figuring out where the Avon Lady fit amongst women's broad spectrum of attitudes about their shifting place in American culture posed a dilemma for Avon.

Rather than capitalize on women's "liberation," Avon reverted to the politically neutral rhetoric it used in other times of social and economic upheaval for women during the Great Depression and World War II.³⁶³ In an economy marred by inflation and jobs that still left many women working in clerical or service positions, Avon presented "growing an Avon business" as an economic lifeboat where women could steer themselves to financial safety. As Sara Evan notes, even though the number of women working fulltime positions increased, their wages and even expanded vocational opportunities did not necessarily follow the same trend given the high number of women who worked in clerical, teaching, or other service jobs.³⁶⁴ Rather than focus on liberating women from their homes, or even the humdrum of their jobs, Avon instead capitalized on themes of economic independence and personal fulfillment as the cornerstone for its recruitment campaigns.³⁶⁵ Ethnically and generationally diverse Avon Ladies in recruitment ads espoused the financial rewards of selling Avon with taglines like, "I helped my son pay his tuition," "I have a houseful of prizes," and "I like running my own Avon business."³⁶⁶ When viewed alongside women's demands for equal pay and advancement opportunities, Avon's strategy of emphasizing women's autonomy as "independent contractors," enabled it to bypass

³⁶² Ibid, 115.

³⁶³ See Chapter 4, "The Dawn of A New Era: Introducing Avon Products and a Depression-Proof Business Strategy," in Manko, *"Ding Dong! Avon Calling!."*

³⁶⁴ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 199.

³⁶⁵ See Chapter 4, "The Dawn of A New Era: Introducing Avon Products and a Depression-Proof Business Strategy," in Manko, *"Ding Dong! Avon Calling!."*

³⁶⁶ "Avon Calling," RG II, Series5: Representatives and Sales Manuals, 1970-1972., Box 120.

the hot button issue of women receiving equal pay in the workplace.³⁶⁷ A welcome letter from Avon's President, David Mitchell, reminded new representatives that "you call no one boss, you punch no time clock, you set your own goals, and work when and how you wish to work."³⁶⁸

Avon sold women the idea of financial independence without being legally required to provide it. As independent sales dealers, Avon representatives were not employees.³⁶⁹ Between the lines, this meant that Avon was not responsible for guaranteeing representatives the unlimited earning potential it promised. Recruitment brochures estimated that the average Avon representative earned \$1.50 per customer visit, and forty percent, or \$40 dollars for every \$100 of sale.³⁷⁰ For orders less than \$100, representatives' commissions fell to 25 percent.³⁷¹ New representatives were also still required to pay what by 1970 was an \$8.50 "order-taking" fee and to cover the cost of training supplies, brochures, order forms, and product samples. Avon described the fee as an investment by promising to provide representatives high quality goods, an exclusive territory and unlimited earning potential.³⁷² Avon continued to frame representative's earning power around the amount of individual willpower, time, and effort women put in "growing their business," rather than on the demand for Avon's products or other barriers they

³⁶⁷ See Evan, *Born for Liberty*; Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class." *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 78.

and Ruth Milkman's concluding chapter, "Women workers, feminism, and the labor movement since the 1960s" in *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of Us Women's Labor History*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

³⁶⁸ "Managing your Avon Business," RG II, Series5: Representatives and Sales Managers, 1970-1972, Box 120.

³⁶⁹ "Avon Sales Dealer's Contract" in "This is the Story of the Avon Representative, 1974. RG II, Series 5, "Representatives and Sales Managers," Box 120.

³⁷⁰ The fine print made it clear that as independent "Sales Dealers" Avon representative were still not legally considered employees.

³⁷¹ "Avon Sales Dealer's Contract" in "This is the Story of the Avon Representative, 1974. RG II, Series 5, "Representatives and Sales Managers," Box 120.

³⁷² Avon implemented a new order taking fee in 1970 that divided the order-taking fee into two separate payments, the first \$3.50 was paid upon appointment, while the remaining \$5 was billed after the representative made their first sales. Avon dropped this fee to \$5 in the mid 1970s as a response to the economic downturn. See "New Representative Training Program: Avon Calling 1970, Procedure Bulletin #23" RG II, Series5, "Representatives and Sales Manuals, 1970-1972, Box 120.

might face while selling cosmetics in a troubled economy.³⁷³ Despite Avon's promise of providing women financial independence, only approximately 40 percent of Avon representatives stayed active for a year or more, and the majority sold Avon as a form of temporary work.³⁷⁴

The 1974 economic recession helped Avon recruit an additional 10,000 representatives, boosting the total number of U.S. representatives to 750,000.³⁷⁵ President David Mitchell reminded stockholders in Avon's annual report that year that "...during periods of general economic weakness, when there is a greater need for supplemental income, there are many people who want to become Avon representatives."³⁷⁶ Avon also responded to the recession by marketing cheaper products and capitalizing on the popularity of its new costume jewelry line, as well as decreasing its "order taking privilege fee" to \$5.³⁷⁷ Given the financial strain on many families at this time, Avon's strategy of positioning itself as an opportunity for women to become "independent businesspersons" may have resonated with women on a variety of levels, whether they were seeking to help support their families or excited about the chance to be their own boss.³⁷⁸ Although Avon literature in the 1970s reiterated many other familiar reasons why women chose to become Avon representatives (e.g., to socialize, their interest in cosmetics, etc.), it also openly acknowledged women's "sense of independence while realizing the satisfaction

³⁷³. The company also touted it as an opportunity to meet new people and win prizes. As such, representatives were told that selling was easy when coupled with Avon's company guarantee and national advertising campaigns. According to one recruitment ad, the average representative earned \$1.50 per customer, visited two customers per hour, and averaged approximately \$3 per hour of work. and could easily be more if they called on more customers.

³⁷⁴ This meant that unlike other businesses, Avon experienced an almost 100 percent turnover of its labor force within any given year, thus making its recruitment campaigns essential. Avon Annual Report 1975, (15)

³⁷⁵ *Avon Annual Report 1975*, RG I, Series 1:Administration, Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 15.

³⁷⁶ *Avon Annual Report 1973*, RG I, Series 1:Administration, Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 3.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁷⁸ Avon's training materials for new representatives by 1973 explicitly framed them as business women and provided detailed steps on "managing their own business." See "Managing your Own Business" materials in RG II, Series 5, Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120.

[they] derived from running businesses of their own.”³⁷⁹ The explicit reference to women as “independent” business owners in 1975 posed a radical departure from previous “pin money” Avon developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than hailing their representatives as beauty ambassadors, Avon now saluted women’s quest to find economic independence by proclaiming, “We’re confident that as their need for fulfillment and independence continue to grow, more and more women around the world will be attracted the Avon opportunity.”³⁸⁰

In their contracts, representatives were considered “independent sales agents,” but Avon still went to great length to oversee and manage its sales force. Many of the management techniques it developed and refined in the 1950s applied to the organizational structure for representatives in the 1970s. Sales meetings still represented one of the primary means of managing and motivating representatives and were now held once a month. However, the girlish tones that promoted them as social events where women could play with make-up and gossip were replaced with an emphasis on the promotional rewards representatives could earn and introducing sales techniques to help them bypass people’s tightening purse strings. While conscious raising groups helped women strategize how to combat oppression in their daily lives, Avon’s female district managers rallied Avon representatives around the universal cause of achieving economic independence and personal fulfillment by setting and achieving benchmark sales goals. Avon also still communicated with representatives through its newsletter, *Outlook*, although advice columns that touted selling Avon as a cure-all for housewives’ boredom were

³⁷⁹ *Avon Annual Report 1975*, RG I, Series 1:Administration, Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 15.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 15.

replaced with articles about effective sales techniques, money management, and instructions on “how to make success happen.”³⁸¹

Success stories with headlines like, “Mother of 6 Makes Car Payments and Stocks the Cupboard with Avon Dollars” underscored Avon’s desire to frame itself as an integral part to helping women and their families survive in a struggling economy. In these success stories, Avon was careful to not to position representatives as their family’s sole breadwinner or conflate their job as an Avon representative with their primary vocation of providing emotional support to their families. Even the mother of six who paid her family’s bills described her job as representative as more family friendly than her job as a lab technician, despite the difficult selling environment:

I’m making more dollars than I did last year but I have to work a little harder. I sometimes have to hold a few orders when customers can’t pay. I put in my personal money and then get it back in a few days. Usually I work three evenings a week and every other Saturday. This way I earn about \$175 a month.³⁸²

Stories like these help Avon balance women’s increasing social and financial independence while also taking care not to alienate the middle-class housewives who still constituted the bulk of Avon’s loyal consumers. Whether or not they worked outside the home and sold Avon to supplement their income – or – sold Avon as a form of social recreation, Avon did not ask women to abandon their commitment to their homes and families, but reworked these commitments to fit the shifting discourse of women’s expanding economic and social opportunities.

³⁸¹ “New Representative Training: Step 2,” 1978. RG II Historical Files: Series 5: Representative Sales Managers, Box 120.

³⁸² *Avon Outlook*, Campaign 1, 1970. RG II, Series 6, Sales Promotions, Subseries C: “Outlook, 1965-1974,” Box 35.

By 1975, Avon positioned itself comfortably in the blurry space between boldly championing women as independent, capable businesspersons and their primary responsibility to their family's emotional, and now financial, well-being. One way Avon achieved this balance was by refashioning its corporate history with an explicitly female-centered narrative. Avon took great care crafting and disseminating a corporate legacy that encouraged representatives and potential recruits to think of themselves as part of a family, rather than a mere company. Most of these legacy articles in the 1950s and 1960s, especially those in its new international subsidiaries, focused on California Perfume Company founder, David McConnell's, quest to create a company dedicated exclusively to serving women. As discussed in Chapter 2, David McConnell used Mrs. Albee to counterbalance his paternal management of the California Perfume Company with a maternal figure who brought respectability to the company. After McConnell paid tribute to Mrs. Albee as "The Mother of the California Perfume Company" in the company history he penned in 1903, references to her disappeared from Avon's representative newsletters and motivational literature.³⁸³ In 1978, Mrs. Albee reappeared in Avon's new "Avon Never Looked So Good" recruitment brochure as the centerpiece of Avon's company history. Soon after, a "Mrs. Albee" award was created for top selling district sales representatives in the United States.³⁸⁴ The mythical "Mother of the California Perfume Company," replaced McConnell as the matriarchal figurehead whose spirit guided Avon's corporate mission and inspired representatives around the world:

³⁸³ See "Avon Never Looked so Good!," 1978 in RG II: Series 5, Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120. For more information about Mrs. Albee's early contributions to the company, see Manko's *Ding Dong! Avon Calling!*, 39-44. As both Roland Marchand and Angel Kwolek-Folland research shows, it was not unusual for companies to use female figureheads to create a family persona that helped justify their expanding power and influence in American public and private life at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, 2 and Marchand's *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 15.

³⁸⁴ Manko, *Ding Dong! Avon Calling!*, 41. For example images, see "Avon Presidents Club Mrs. PFE Albee Figurine" at Ruby Lane collector's website at <http://www.rubylane.com/shops/five4us/item/10138?gbase=1>; accessed on February 4, 2010.

Ninety years ago, it was unusual for women to be in business, but Mr. McConnell's choice for the company's first representative was Mrs. P.F.E Albee. For six months, she was the only Representative, and not only did she sell, but she also recruited other women as Representatives, too. And so, Mrs. Albee made Mr. McConnell's dream of the person to person distribution of the products a reality...if you'd told Mrs. Albee that she as a business pioneer and that people the world over would follow in her footsteps for scores of years to come, she probably wouldn't have believed you. But that, of course, is just what's happened.³⁸⁵

More than just another example of the maternal figureheads U.S. companies created to help soften and personalize their public images, Mrs. Albee's story was also routinely invoked in Avon's subsidiaries around the world. Her grandmotherly image assured representatives of their place in Avon's family that consisted of over 700,000 representatives in 18 nations dedicated to helping themselves, their families, and other women.³⁸⁶ "The idea of a woman adding to her income by devoting part of her time to her own business is stronger now than ever. And the tradition of service that the Representative provides – personalized attention, familiarity, with customers' needs and tastes, is rare and in greater demand than when Avon began."³⁸⁷

With Mrs. Albee's help, Avon successfully reshaped its corporate persona to one that openly embraced and celebrated its female sales representatives' newfound independence and spirit. Much like Avon's decision to embrace and celebrate minority women a few years earlier, the Avon Lady's transition from a suburban homemakers to an independent business persons was not predicated entirely on notions of gender equality nor an explicit attempt to adopt the second wave feminists political and economic rhetoric.³⁸⁸ Avon targeted its newly revised,

³⁸⁵ "Avon Never Looked So Good," 1976, RG II: Series 5, Reps and Sales Managers, Box 120, p 19.

³⁸⁶ "Avon Calling: Special Report from Successful Representatives," 1975, RG II: Historical Files; Series 5: Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120.

³⁸⁷ "Avon Calling: Special Report from Successful Representatives," 1975, RG II: Historical Files; Series 5: Representatives and Sales Managers, Box 120.

³⁸⁸ Radical feminists posed a particularly dangerous threat to Avon's public image given their vocal and visible protests against the beauty industry in the 1970s. A number of scholars cite the protest of the 1968 Miss American Pageant as the first, and most publicized, of these protests. See Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 260-263; Evan's *Born for Liberty*, 286. For one of the first and most influential critiques of mass advertising and beauty culture, see Betty Friedan's Chapter 9, "'The Sexual Sell' in *The Feminine Mystique*."

woman-centered history to women who found themselves adjusting to a rapidly changing world where many worked out of economic necessity rather than to exercise new social freedom. Selling Avon provided many women the opportunity to redefine their sense of self in light of shifting social norms, while also reminding them they were part of a family where other women shared the same dreams, aspirations, and circumstances.

By the end of the decade, the Avon Lady's make-over from a middle-aged, white suburban housewife was completed when the N.W. Ayer Advertising Agency unveiled its new campaign: "Avon. It's A Beautiful Way to Work."³⁸⁹ Avon's Product Managers prediction that at the core, women in the 1970s would stay the same while "thunder of change crashed" about them proved wrong as feminists championed legislative, educational, and other social reforms during the decade.³⁹⁰ Despite this ill-fated prediction, Avon adapted to these changes, albeit slowly at first. It transitioned from a company that relied upon and represented the needs and desires of white women, to recruiting ethnic minorities, working women, and even men, with the promise of economic independence and security in a changing world. When coupled with the products produced for minority consumers, Avon cemented its newly progressive corporate image by embracing diversity as the cornerstone of its representative's success:

All over the United States, Representatives are successfully selling Avon. They are diverse as all Americans: women (and men, too)...of all working ages...from cities, suburbs and rural areas. They live and sell in high-rise apartments, or single family houses, or mobile homes, or college campuses. Some sell Avon full-time, and others part time. Some started yesterday, and some have sold for well over fifty years.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ See Advertising Scrapbook, "Representative Enhancement Campaign, 1976-1980: RG I: Archives, Series 7: Advertising; Subseries A: Advertising Scrapbooks, Box OS-40. For video footage of Avon's television commercials, see "Avon Calling: Composite of Avon Calling Ads, 1950-1980s," Box 67.

³⁹⁰ "Product Marketing: 5-Year Overview Conference Transcript, March 1970." RG I: Archive, Series 8, Subseries B: Product Marketing; Box 65, 2.

³⁹¹ *Avon Annual Report 1978*, RG I, Series 1:Administration, Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 15.

The Avon Lady may not have been officially liberated from the confines of suburbia, but now she was encouraged to think of herself as an independent business woman who could help support her and her family's financial destiny. Given the increasing competition in the beauty industry and a growing awareness of minority and young consumers' increasing purchasing power, Avon had no choice but to revise its corporate image if it was to retain its status as the number one cosmetics manufacturer in the United States.

Glass Ceilings and Internal Dissent: Female Executives in the 1970s

Avon's transition to acknowledging and embracing working women and ethnic minorities helped refashion its corporate persona into a progressive company that appealed to women across a spectrum of racial, classed, and geographic divides. The 1970s also raised questions about the gendered and sexed dimensions of Avon's internal corporate culture. Avon did not face large-scale demonstrations or boycotts from second-wave feminists protesting the beauty industry nor negotiate with labor unions that advocated improved pay and working conditions for female employees, yet its male-dominated organizational culture did not emerge unscathed during the 1970s. In 1971 a New Jersey woman sued Avon for sex discrimination for denying her promotion request from a product counselor to a division sales manager.³⁹² Before she filed her suit, none of Avon's approximately 100 domestic divisions included female managers, nor did the fourteen regional and seven national branch positions. At the same time, twenty-nine men sat on Avon's all-male Board of Directors and oversaw the planning and execution of Avon's corporate vision and operations.³⁹³ Even David McConnell's daughter, whose family

³⁹² Bender, Marilyn. "Avon: Chiming True?" *New York Times*, November 28 1971.

³⁹³ Ibid.

retained over seventeen percent of Avon's publicly traded stock in 1971, never served on the Board of Directors or in a management capacity, leaving her family's business to the discretion of her son, Hays Clark, Avon's Vice President of Avon's International Division during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁹⁴

Avon's all-male management team and paternal leadership went unchallenged, or at least unarticulated in the public sphere, for most of Avon's eighty-five year history. Avon's male executives were well aware that their economic livelihood and success relied almost exclusively on women for the sale, distribution, and consumption of its products. Outside of facilities management, most of Avon's operations from Field Operations to Advertising, were dedicated to trying to identify, manage, and produce products that satisfied women's insatiable need for commercially produced beauty products. Avon CEO Wayne Hicklin aptly expressed Avon's relationship and appreciation for women at a 1971 stockholder's meeting by declaring, "We love women!"³⁹⁵ Unlike its early competitors, Avon executives were keenly aware of the possibilities –and profit – of placing women at the center of their business, and prided themselves on helping women achieve their dreams. By the early 1970s, however, the influence of the women's liberation movement on challenging sex-based stereotypes and advocating women's right to participate and help lead America's public and private institutions made the lack of female leadership at Avon even more worrisome. As *New York Times* reporter Marilyn Bender noted in 1971, "Stockholders and social critics have observed that Avon has been a conspicuously female company run by men."³⁹⁶ In 1971, only four women served in an

³⁹⁴ Bender, Marilyn. "Avon Rings a New Bell: Women in Officer Role." *New York Times* August 18 1972.

³⁹⁵ Bender, "Avon: Chiming True?"

³⁹⁶ Bender, "Avon Rings a New Bell."

executive capacity as “directors” of individual departments and were excluded from Avon’s all-male Board of Directors.³⁹⁷

Avon’s tradition of paternal leadership ended that same year when it elected its first woman to the Board, Mrs. Cecily Cannan Selby, the executive director of the Girl Scouts of America who also held a PhD and active career in chemistry.³⁹⁸ A year later Avon promoted two female directors to the positions of Vice President. Phyllis Davis became Vice President of sales promotion and advertising, while longtime Avon executive Patricia Neighbors was named Vice President of District Management where she oversaw and coordinated the policies for the 2,000 female district managers who recruited and motivated Avon’s sales representatives, the basis of Avon’s entire domestic distribution system. By promoting female directors from within, Avon maintained its tradition of training and grooming its executives internally, a process that had enabled a number of men to begin their careers as office boys and clerks only to emerge as Avon President and CEO. This “rags to riches” motif reinforced Avon’s corporate image as an organization where one’s financial and professional dreams really could come true, yet Avon’s version of the “good ole boy” tradition also prevented many of its female executives from advancing to positions that would qualify them for upper level executive positions.³⁹⁹

Whether it was the sex discrimination suit or increasing public scrutiny that spurred Avon to action, between 1970 and 1972, Avon finally began to redress women’s limited visibility and participation in its organizational corporate culture. In 1972 it elected its second female to its

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Selby held a PhD in chemistry.

³⁹⁹ David McConnell’s story of rags-to-riches fame from an office clerk in Pasadena to Avon President in 1972 was often cited as an example of the internal promotion and management strategies Avon successfully employed until the 1980s when it hired a string of CEOs whose “outsider” status and lack of understanding of the personal nature of direct-selling was often blamed for Avon’s future financial woes in the late 1970s and 1980s. For David McConnell’s history at Avon see Marilyn Bender, “Avon Chief Executive Relinquishes Post.” *New York Times*, January 8, 1972; For an overview of management changes in the 1980s see Chapter 2, “Stay Focused” in Laura Klepacki’s *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*.

Board of Directors, Mrs. Ernesta Procope, the President of E.G. Bowman Company, Inc., the largest African-American owned insurance company in the United States.⁴⁰⁰ Its 1972 Corporate Responsibility Plan pledged to examine Avon's internal policies for evidence of sex discrimination and implemented programs to help recruit women for higher level management jobs.⁴⁰¹ It also recommitted Avon to recruiting women for upper level management positions; working with community outreach groups, government organizations, women's colleges, and advertising in professional women's journals.⁴⁰²

Similar to the workshops it conducted to increase management's awareness and understanding of racial stereotypes and black history, in 1972 Avon held a "Women in Management Awareness Training Program" that examined the realities of women in U.S. workforce and addressed Avon's male managers' prevailing attitudes about women's abilities to work outside the home. The program was presented to pilot groups and Avon's Corporate Officers in 1973 and later to Avon's division managers who oversaw female district managers around the country with information provided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau in a memo titled, "Male Workers More Equal Than Female Workers? No! All Workers are Equal."⁴⁰³ The first myth dispelled the notion that "A woman's place is in the home," a myth that also coincidentally served as the primary cornerstone of Avon's business. The memo described what it called the "reality" of women's place in their homes:

⁴⁰⁰ "Press Release," 1972. RG II, Box 110, "Clips from Avon & You regarding Policies, WOE, Minorities."

⁴⁰¹ "The Voice of the Consumer: Avon Listens and Responds" in *Avon & You*, Summer, 1972. RG II, Series I Admin, "Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

⁴⁰² "Statement of Corporate Responsibility" reprinted in *The Voice of the Consumer: Avon Listens and Responds* in *Avon & You*, Summer, 1972. RG II, Series I Admin, "Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

⁴⁰³ "The Myth and the Reality: Male Workers are more Equal than Female Workers? No! All Workers are Equal" written by U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standard Administration, Women's Bureau, 1972. RG II, Series 1 Admin, Women in Management, Box 110. "Equal Opportunity in Employment," Procedure Bulletin issued by Executive Vice President, #49, March 6, 1973. RG II, Series I Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

Homemaking for women without small children is no longer a full time job. Goods and services formerly produced in the home are now commercially available; laborsaving devices have lightened or eliminated much work around the home. Today, half of all women between 18-64 years of age are in the labor force where they are making a substantial contribution to the growth of the Nation's economy. Studies show that 9 out of 10 girls will work outside the home at sometime in their lives.⁴⁰⁴

Other memos in the training program, presumably created by Avon, included titles like "Attitudes Towards Women in Management," and "Managing a Woman Effectively."⁴⁰⁵ They also addressed sex-based stereotypes about women's innate ability or desire for professional careers with statements like, "Women don't have characteristics of successful managers" and "Women aren't career oriented."⁴⁰⁶ The "Managing a Woman Effectively" memo tentatively acknowledged Avon's male manager's sex-based stereotypes stating, "Because we might tend to regard women as fitting a narrow stereotype and not consider them for non-traditional opportunities (training programs, assignments, or positions), we should be especially attentive to her individual needs and interests."⁴⁰⁷ It outlined management techniques for Avon's [male] managers to guide discussions about women's careers and stated that male managers should "conduct an open, candid session based on her inputs" and "consider how realistic her goals are." The memo also advised [male] managers to answer female employee or representative's questions and "not dismiss her based on the possibility she is restricted by family commitments, personal interests, or "whatever."⁴⁰⁸

These were important first steps to combat Avon's paternal work culture, its 1972 Corporate Social Responsibility Statement's that pledged to commit to "positive program to

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁰⁵ There are no authors or organizations cited in these memos but they appear as separate from those distributed by the U.S. Labor Department's Women's Bureau.

⁴⁰⁶ "Attitudes Towards Women in Management." No author. RG II, Series I, "Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, Box 110.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

prevent any discrimination whatsoever in hiring and promotion practices and in the treatment of people, because of their race, color, creed, sex, or age.”⁴⁰⁹ Yet between 1972 and 1977, Avon’s commitment to women’s equal opportunity in the workplace produced considerably less policies and critical evaluation compared to the expanded hiring, recruiting, and supplier programs it developed for minorities. Outside some statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, few documents describe or evaluate programs Avon implemented to curb sex-based discrimination and promotion opportunities. Records indicate the number of female division managers from 1969-1972 increased from zero to thirteen of a total of approximately 100 divisions, but is devoid of detailed surveys, reports, or internal audits that examine the impact of these programs on the attitudes of Avon’s male managers or Avon’s female employees.⁴¹⁰

Where we can see evidence, however, is in the tone and rhetoric of the memos Avon distributed to its male managers about strategies for successful management strategies. Its policy memos and internal procedural bulletins read as if they were created primarily by – and for – male executives, evidenced by constructing the subject/reader as masculine and the object/subject feminine in sentences like, “On a day-to-day basis, avoid making exceptions for her just because she is a woman. Travel may be just as attractive and comfortable for her as for any man.” The collective “we” also helped construct men as both author and reader of these memos with sentences like, “Our concerns should be that we are doing all we can to promote the development and success of all individuals in Avon, including women.”⁴¹¹ Even the official title

⁴⁰⁹ “Avon’s Statement of Corporate Responsibility” reprinted in *The Voice of the Consumer: Avon Listens and Responds* in *Avon & You*, Summer, 1972. RG II, Series 1, “Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977,” Box 110, .5.

⁴¹⁰ This figure comes from Marilyn Bender’s 1972 article in the *New York Times*, “Avon Rings a New Bell” rather than the archive.

⁴¹¹ Because the memos do not have an author or identifying information about which department created it, it is impossible to know who wrote, organized, and administered the training session. See “Managing a Woman Effectively,” RG II, “Administration: Policies/Women in Management,” 1972, Box 110.

of the memo, “Managing A Woman Effectively” constructed women as the objects rather than as active subjects and with sentences like “You should conduct an open, candid session based on her inputs.”⁴¹² Ironically, the memo encouraged Avon’s male managers to rethink their use of gendered pronouns, despite the fact that women’s voices were conspicuously absent from the memo itself. In the section titled, “Climate Control,” the memo encouraged managers to use his/her pronouns and “men and women” to “remind others, and yourself, that our concern is with the women of Avon, as well as the men.”⁴¹³ Avon’s inability to articulate women as active subjects or provide space for women to speak for themselves in its memos and educational programming in the early 1970s underscore the degree to which Avon’s top male managers were removed from some of the core concerns and strategies feminists advocated to combat patriarchy and sex-based discrimination in the work place. Rather than encouraging and allowing a space for women to speak for themselves and use their personal experiences as a springboard for institutional and social change, Avon’s male managers continued to see themselves the leaders of Avon’s newfound attempts to address sex-based work discrimination.

Part of this may be individual personalities and cultural prejudices, but one could also argue that it was a byproducts of working for a company that dedicated and prided itself on “understanding the needs” of women. For the better part of a century, Avon’s male executives and managers were rewarded and promoted on their perceived knowledge of women and their ability translate this knowledge into profitable programs and policies. Many of these same men took extreme and genuine pride that they worked for a company committed to bettering women’s lives. A discourse of service and uplift permeated Avon’s internal culture in everything from its

⁴¹² “Managing a Woman Effectively.” No author. RG II, Series I Admin, Box 110, “Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977.”

⁴¹³ Ibid.

Annual Reports to stockholders to the speeches given at its domestic and international conferences. As discussed in Chapter 2, Avon's male executives in subsidiaries across the world were charged with the task of extolling Avon's ideology of economic uplift and service to mid-level managers and representatives around the world. These same senior leaders failed to recognize that their paternal management practices consistently framed women as in need of supervision and control, while also undercutting advancement opportunities for the few female executives within Avon's own corporate ranks. Before 1972, to ascend the corporate ladder at Avon, female employees had to navigate their way through a labyrinth of male managers and executives who oversaw Avon's entire operation, a process that stood in direct contradiction to Avon's corporate persona of helping women make their professional and personal dreams come true.

There were some notable exceptions to this pattern. Some of Avon's female executives during its domestic heyday in the 1950s served in critical leadership positions at Avon's corporate headquarters, like Irene Nunemaker, for example, who worked at Avon as its New Product Director during the 1950s. Nunemaker retired with enough stock to fund the construction of a new building for the University of Kansas's Honor's Program in the 1970s⁴¹⁴ Outside of these exceptions, in the 1970s, Avon's male executives seemed to possess a limited understanding on how their own sex-based stereotypes shaped Avon's corporate culture, and it is unclear whether Avon's few female executives or mid-level managers voiced any potential grievances or whether male managers actively sought out the experiences and opinions from women themselves. There is one instance in 1971 before she was promoted to Vice President of District Management when Patricia Neighbors challenged male division managers to rethink the

⁴¹⁴ See "The University's Honor's Program" A look to the past, present and future." PowerPoint Presentation accessed on April 6, 2010 available at www.honors.ku.edu/about/HP%20Presentation.pptm.

patronizing tone they used when meeting with their female district managers. James Preston, CEO of Avon in the late 1980s recalls:

That daring woman proceeded to around the room addressing each of the some twenty men and compliment them on their hair, suits, ties, and other personal appearance details. The men were getting embarrassed and red-faced. She proceeded to explain, ‘This is the way 75 male district sales managers start meetings every month with female sales associates. Don’t think of a moment that the emotions you just experienced aren’t experienced by these women every month.’⁴¹⁵

Patricia Neighbor’s attempt to speak on behalf of Avon’s female employees may have momentarily caught male managers’ attention in 1971, but it did not result in any immediate or structural changes to Avon’s corporate culture. As Preston noted in an interview years later, “I would like to say it was a watershed movement, but all it did was make the men angry.”⁴¹⁶

Between 1972 and 1977, Avon made incremental changes and declared its willingness to tackle issues of sex-based discrimination and women’s equal employment opportunities. It listed women’s equal employment opportunity as the first in a series of social concerns in its 1977 Corporate Social Responsibility Plan by stating, “Avon has hallways been aware of women’s need for independence to enhance their own lives and their families.”⁴¹⁷ The brochure described how Avon’s expanded internal and external reviews would help ensure women’s and minorities advancement with Avon’s Management Planning Program that “once these people are identified and their development needs are ascertained, they participate in seminars and workshops which address those needs so that when the job opens up, they are prepared to assume those positions.”

⁴¹⁵ Laura Klepacki, *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*, 42.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

⁴¹⁷ “Avon Corporate Responsibility: Today’s Challenges,” 1977. RG II, Series1: Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977,” Box 110.

⁴¹⁸ Avon also developed connections with progressive women's organizations like the National Organization for Women, the Legal and Educational Fund, and the National Council of Negro Women and Business and Professional Women's Foundation. Colorful red, white and blue Avon advertisements with the tagline, "The Spirit of Avon: 1996-1976" were featured in the National Council of Negro Women and Casita Maria Fiesta Bicentennial programs and visually reaffirmed Avon's commitment to celebrating women of color, while also underscoring the spirit of rugged individualism that appeared in many of its service advertisements for the United State's bicentennial festivities in 1976.⁴¹⁹

Avon balanced its commitment to these liberal, progressive women's organizations by supporting the Martha Movement and the Congress of Neighborhood Women, groups that championed women's personal development as homemakers. Avon's CSR plan did not rationalize nor explain these seemingly contradictory approaches to women's economic and social independence and merely stated, "Groups like these encourage a woman's personal growth as a homemaker and an appreciation of her importance to her family and community."⁴²⁰ By supporting a variety of women's organizations that both championed and contested the women's liberation movement in the United States during the 1970s, Avon represented itself as company dedicated to women who across all sides of the ideological spectrum of the women's liberation movement. On one hand, Avon championed itself as satisfying women's demand for autonomy and economic independence by promoting their entrepreneurial spirit. On the other, it positioned itself as a form of flexible employment women could adapt to their domestic

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. Avon's 1977 CSR Plan renewed Avon's commitment to supporting minority business, consumers, community support, and responsive philanthropy.

⁴¹⁹ Public Affairs, 1973-197 Advertising Scrapbook, RG I: Series 7: Advertising, Subseries A, Advertising Scrapbooks, Box OS-48.

⁴²⁰ "Avon Corporate Responsibility: Today's Challenges," 1977. RG II, Series 1: Admin: Business Ethics/Policies, 1931-1977, "Box 110, 19.

responsibilities as wives and mothers. Like the minority public relations events discussed in the previous chapter, this strategic and flexible strategy allowed Avon to refashion its public image and appeal to the range of meanings American women associated with the word “liberation” in the 1970s. It also laid the foundation for future public relations campaigns in the coming decades where large scale philanthropy organizations and events provided credibility to its corporate mission of satisfying the needs of “all women – globally.” Between 1977 and 1979, the number of female employees at Avon rose from 51 to 74 percent, and at the end of the decade, 70 percent of Avon’s management consisted of women, even though this figure most likely reflects the mid-level female district sales managers who recruited and trained Avon representatives.⁴²¹ Top level executive positions still remained elusive for women at Avon during the 1970s and 1980s, and it wouldn’t be until 1999 when Avon finally elected its first female CEO, Andrea Jung, whose vision helped revitalize Avon’s global vision as it entered the twenty first century. Rapid advancements in communication technology and an increasingly interconnected global economy required Avon to rethink its global business strategy and the regions of the world that would provide the newest generation of recruits for its transnational team of beauty ambassadors.

⁴²¹ *Avon Annual Report*, 1979.

Avon's methods of distribution have proven to be one of the most potent methods of penetrating markets throughout the world. Today, Avon's sales of cosmetics and toiletries, both in the United States and worldwide, far surpass those of any other company.

- "Letter to Shareholders, *1975 Annual Report*, Avon Products, Inc.⁴²²

Chapter 6: Managing a Beauty Empire, 1973-1996

Much like the ethnic pride and women's liberation movement left a permanent mark on Avon's recruitment strategies and corporate persona in the 1970s, increasing communication and integration of the world's economy profoundly influenced its business strategies outside the United States. In 1972, Avon opened its new world headquarters in Manhattan, New York at 9 W. 57th Street. The skyscraper symbolized Avon's stature in U.S. beauty industry and its growing presence in the global beauty business. While the geographic reach and number of Avon Ladies around the world continued to expand, in many ways Avon's world was also shrinking. This combination excited and challenged the way the Avon conceptualized and managed its international expansion. As one executive declared at Avon's 1973 International General Managers Conference, "We accept the proposition that modern communication and transportation have it made it possible for companies operating in multiple countries to encompass their scattered operations within a single corporate strategy from one central nerve center."⁴²³ Avon was ready to embrace what would later be widely understood as globalization.⁴²⁴

From its early days in the 1950s, Avon actively pursued a number of new international markets, and by 1972 over 550,000, Avon Ladies were calling in 18 different countries: nine in

⁴²² *1972 Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box .1

⁴²³ William E. Griffin, Jr. "Your Role in Integrated World Management," RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, "Avon World Management Planning Conference, June 1973" Box 4, 4.

⁴²⁴ Robert Antonio and Alessandro Bonanno. "A New Global Capitalism? From "Americanism and Fordism" To "Americanization-Globalization"." *American Studies* 41, no. 2/3 (2000): 33-77.

Europe; five in Latin America; and two in Asia.⁴²⁵ Between 1954 and 1972, Avon divided the organizational and management responsibilities between its International and U.S. operations. Avon International was housed at Lexington Avenue in New York with its own executive officers, staff, support groups, and quality control units, and as Avon's international ventures grew, so did Avon International's responsibilities as it produced an increasing number of brochures and coordinated Avon's geographically scattered field operations.⁴²⁶ This changed in June of 1973 when, amidst a flurry of speculation about new communication technology and integrated national economies, Avon executives announced the birth of a new multinational corporation, "Avon Products, Inc."⁴²⁷ Longtime president of Avon International, Hays Clark, encouraged international general managers to embrace this change in the face of "... increasing competition for the consumer dollar, hindrances to direct selling, a sophisticated public who required more marketing, nationalistic trends, fiscal controls, increased taxes, rising standards of living, a more cosmetics-conscious public, and uniform taste in products."⁴²⁸ Clark assured general managers that in addition to providing more support, communication, and service to international subsidiaries, Avon Products, Inc. provided the company a sizeable tax break. The term "corporate" now applied to everyone involved in Avon's worldwide management team. Distinctions between Avon's domestic and foreign operations no longer described its organizational culture or the geographic location of its subsidiaries. Avon Products, Inc. was officially a multinational corporation with operations and interests that spanned the globe.⁴²⁹ In

⁴²⁵ 1972 *Annual Report*.

⁴²⁶ Hayes Clark, RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, "Avon World Management Planning Conference, June 1973" Box 4.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11

⁴²⁹ I draw on international business historian Geoffrey Jones's definition of multinational corporations, namely that modern "multi-nationals" own income generating assets and foreign investment in multiple countries. Avon Products, Inc. owned assets, including a large number of manufacturing plants, around the world. Some of its subsidiaries were wholly owned by Avon, while others were joint ventures in which Avon forged partnerships with

reality, however, geographic, political, and economic particulars did not disappear with the birth of Avon's multinational company. State-sanctioned taxes, labor regulations, and the openness countries had to hosting a U.S. based direct-selling system, provided a range of obstacles for Avon as it continued to seek new export markets.⁴³⁰

Archival materials chart Avon's international expansion during the 1950s and 1960s but abruptly stop in the mid 1970s.⁴³¹ To address this uneven archival record, this chapter does not attempt to present a linear history of Avon's global expansion from the 1970s to the present. Instead, it explores the gendered dimensions of Avon's global expansion from the 1970s until the 1990s? The first section examines the gendered discourses of entrepreneurialism and individual uplift Avon's male managers deployed as they looked to new and developing markets in Africa, Asia, and South America at the end of the 1970s. The second section summarizes the financial woes and managerial changes Avon experienced in the 1980s and the early 1990s as it staved off hostile takeover attempts and struggled to retain its identity and focus on the "feminine" business of selling beauty. The chapter concludes by examining the impetus behind Avon's male executives decision to embrace and celebrate Avon as a "woman's company" as it neared the end of the twentieth century.

local companies. For definitions, see Geoffrey Jones, *The Evolution of International Business: An Introduction*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

⁴³⁰ The list of presentations on the agenda for Avon's 1973 World Management Conference illustrate the breadth of Avon's concerns and strategies it devised for a new era of global commerce. Conference presentations outlined Avon's new communication and technology; the streamlining of its manufacturing and support operations; and its world strategic plan to minimize taxes. The \$200 million Avon paid in income, excise, and property taxes in the United States and other countries was the company's largest single expense, and presenters explained the considerable tax benefits Avon earned as a multi-national. See "World-Wide Tax Planning" by J.F.Kehoe. RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, "Avon World Management Planning Conference, June 1973" Box 4.

⁴³¹ Outside its Annual Reports, most of the material in the archive ends in the 1980s, the decade in which Avon experienced massive internal shifts, financial setbacks, and management changes. The scattered materials that deal with Avon's recent history in the 1980s and 1990s are either absent, under a time seal, or focus on the company's domestic philanthropic activities and public relations campaigns, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Many modern and postmodern discussions of economic globalization trace its origins in the 1970s when rapid changes in communication technology and spatial reconfigurations of labor and capital created an integrated world economy.⁴³² In the middle of theorizing the various causes and consequences of “globalization” feminist critics have derided totalizing theories of globalization that neglect gender in their analysis and for framing globalization itself as an implicitly masculine driven-enterprises shaped by white, first world men seeking to capitalize and manage people and resources in the developing world.⁴³³ Feminist scholars have provided a number of ways to reexamine gendered configurations at local levels that offer a more complex analysis of the deployment and enlistment of gendered bodies, labors, and social practices. Carla Freeman, for example, suggests that “local studies promise to make clear that the historical and structural underpinnings and contemporary form of globalization are themselves deeply imbued with specific notions about femininity and masculinity and expectations for the roles of women and men.”⁴³⁴ In previous chapters I have argued that individual Avon Ladies operating in local, one-on-one sales environments sustained and propelled Avon’s expanding global beauty empire. Avon’s transnational team of beauty ambassadors “on the ground” distributed its wares in neighborhoods all over the globe, but Avon’s gendered management practices had always been developed and administered from its headquarters in New York. What happens when we listen to how Avon’s men conceptualized, and rationalized its expansion as an official multinational corporation in 1973? More importantly, what role did gender play promoting Avon’s direct-selling on a global scale?

⁴³² Robert Antonio and Alessandro Bonanno. "A New Global Capitalism?"

⁴³³ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁴³⁴ Carla Freeman, "Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization." *Signs* 26, no. 4 (2001), 1011.

The transcripts of the speeches given at Avon's 1973 conference provide a rare window into the rhetoric and gendered discourses that shaped how Avon's male senior executives saw themselves as leading Avon's global expansion in a new, integrated world economy. The paternal rhetoric of uplift and service Avon trained its international GMs to embrace as the leaders of a benevolent female army in the 1950s and 1960s was replaced in 1973 with metaphorical comparisons between Avon's global beauty business and the Roman Empire. As William Griffin described, "No, being a subsidiary Manager of multinational corporation is no bed of roses. It probably poses the greatest challenges of its kind since the days of the Roman Empire, when if you call your history, the most delicate job of all was that of the Proconsul." As Proconsuls, Griffin reminded Avon's international general managers of their pivotal roles as liaison between Avon Product's "one world vision" and the local managers and sales representatives who literally carried Avon's message of economic uplift door to door. In many ways, Griffin's speech echoes the argument and metaphor critics of globalization would advance years later, especially Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who argued that global capitalism would supplant the power of the nation-state with a decentralized, de-territorialized new world order they called *Empire*.⁴³⁵ They also reflect what sociologist Leslie Sklair describes as the measureable (and sometimes abstract) practices the "transnational professional class that

⁴³⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. 1st Harvard University Press. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), xii. *Empire* was applauded by a number of scholars for its wide-ranging historical assessment of the shifting role of the nation-state in the world's economic, social, and political affairs, while others note that its Marxist framework presents an over-deterministic account of capitalism that fails to account for the intersections between private capital interests and state politics. Feminist scholars also criticize *Empire* for neglecting gender in its analysis. See Louise Yelin, "Globalizing Subjects," *Signs* 29, no. 2 (2004): 439-55. The most convincing arguments against *Empire* in my opinion come from nationalism, post-colonial, and feminist scholars who argue that increasing militarized conflicts and policing of state borders demonstrate the adaptive and hegemonic power of nation-states, especially since 9/11 and the United States' invasion of Iraq. See for example, Grewal, Inderpal. *Transnational America*, 21.

promote an aggressive consumerist ideology that leaves little room for resistance outside the mass-consumption of goods.⁴³⁶

At Avon this particular professional executive class was compromised primarily of men, most of whom worked in the United States in the upper echelons of Avon Products, Inc. in New York City. General managers who ran Avon's international subsidiaries were the other transnational executives integral to managing Avon's global empire. Nowhere on the program for the 1973 World Planning Conference does it indicate if any of Avon's few female executives presented or attended the conference. The fact that women were either absent or severely underrepresented at Avon's international conferences is not surprising given the limited number of women serving in executive positions at Avon during the 1970s. It also reinforces R.W. Connell's assertion that globalization is driven and framed by a hegemonic masculinized management culture that naturalizes men's management of women, and in Avon's case, also constructs them as consumers.⁴³⁷ In 1973 Avon's transnational professional class of jet-setting male executives, armed with marketing plans and strategies to convert women into Avon Ladies in every region of the world. The gendered management of Avon's global beauty empire was constructed and managed by men similar to its first international conference in 1963, although there were some important differences, especially with regard to equating Avon as a direct extension of U.S. economic or political power. In 1973, Avon's senior leaders reminded male executives of the danger of conflating Avon's role in the world with American power, or assuming the American managers had all the answers, especially when it came to problems with

⁴³⁶ According to Sklair, executives, state officials, media organizations, non-governmental organizations and other social actors compromise this elite and powerful transnational class. Leslie Sklair "Transnational Practices, Corporations, Class and Consumerism." Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*, (Oxford ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001),

⁴³⁷ .Connell

local taxes, legislation aimed at curbing direct-selling, and the shifting beauty culture in individual subsidiaries:⁴³⁸

We see the entire world as a market and as a site for the production of goods and services. We understand that an idea can be born anywhere and expressed in any language. We seek profitable opportunity in addressing the demands of a privileged few, but the urgent needs of the overwhelming many.⁴³⁹

Avon's male managers talked about and presented direct selling as a form of benevolent, paternal uplift that served others, namely women, in need of additional income and/or who were deprived of cosmetics. Throughout the conference, it became clear that the "urgent needs of the overwhelming many" represented regions of the world where Avon's commercial beauty aids or direct-selling had yet to be implemented, giving Avon executives another opportunity to infuse their paternal mission with a sense of purpose that transcended economies of scale and profit. One of the places "in need" Avon identified was in the Soviet Union. Soon after President Richard Nixon's visit to the U.S.S.R. in 1972, the Soviet Union's State Committee for Science and Technology invited Avon's senior leaders to tour a number of its cosmetics manufacturing plants.⁴⁴⁰ Avon executives described the successful trip as providing a glimpse into the future when increasing consumer demand in Eastern Europe and rising standards of living would enable Avon to capitalize on its enormous economies of scale.⁴⁴¹ Avon was pleased with its agreement to distribute its wares directly through the Soviet government, making Avon one of

⁴³⁸ William E. Griffin, Jr. "Your Role in Integrated World Management," RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, "Avon World Management Planning Conference, June 1973" Box 4, 4.

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁴⁰ "Avon Greeted by Moscow Officials," 1972, RG II: Series I: "Admin: Business Ethics and Policies, 1931-1977," Box 110.

⁴⁴¹ "New Markets for Avon and Eastern Europe and Export," in 1973 *World Management Conference*, RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, "Avon World Management Planning Conference, June 1973" Box 4.

the earliest, if not the first, U.S. cosmetics companies to penetrate the Iron Curtain.⁴⁴² Avon's trip to the U.S.S.R. illustrated yet another instance of beauty operating as a highly politicized and profitable venture where state interests both collided and converged. If feminists in the United States in the early 1970s succeeded in arguing that the personal was political, Avon's successful negotiations with the Russian government highlighted that selling beauty was profitable and geopolitical.⁴⁴³ In many ways, this event serves as a postscript to Victoria De Grazia's study of the United States' power and influence in Western Europe following World War II when U.S. consumer goods companies promoted a specific brand of consumer-democracy that redefined the symbolic associations and access of goods for Europeans, especially women who companies saw as counterparts to "Mrs. Consumers" in the United States. In a presentation on New Markets at its 1973 Conference, one executive described the political significance of Avon's ability to sell cosmetics in the U.S.S.R.:

They realized that without adequate economic might in the worlds markets, their aspirations to become a true World Power would not be taken seriously by other nations of the world....Soviet Leaders have recognized that this cannot be achieved rapidly without resorting to financial and technological assistance from the West...Priorities, therefore, although not entirely shifted, have still been modified sufficiently to allow for increased satisfaction of consumer demand for a better standard of living an greater choice of products. Among these, cosmetics have an important place.⁴⁴⁴

Avon's diplomatic and economic connections in 1972 proved to be a low-cost, lucrative investment that provided Avon an advantage when other Eastern European markets opened in the

⁴⁴² A number of historians have documented how many U.S. consumer goods have been unintentionally appropriated as representations of freedom, political subversion, and/or resistance, especially during the Cold War where Levi Jeans, Coke, and Marlboro Cigarettes were often marketed as extensions of U.S. democracy which advocated people's inherent right to consume. See for example, Rob Kroes's essay, "Advertising: The Commodification of American Icons of Freedom" in Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May's *"Here, There, and Everywhere" : The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 273-287.

⁴⁴³ See Chapter 7, "The Consumer-Citizen" and Chapter 9, "A Model Mrs. Consumer" in Victoria De Grazia's *Irresistible Empire*.

⁴⁴⁴ "New Markets for Avon Eastern Europe and Export by Cyril Geacintov" in *1973 World Management Conference*, RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, Box 4.

1990s.⁴⁴⁵ It also provided Avon an opportunity to tout its commitment to making beauty accessible to any woman who so desired it, regardless of the political restraints that might limit her choices.

Avon's male managers continued equating the work its female distributors performed as a reflection of women's democratic freedoms as entrepreneurs and as consumers. Avon continued to adapt American notions of rugged individualism and the "self-made" man for its increasingly diverse and geographically scattered female sales force. At the conclusion of the conference, Avon's newly elected President David Mitchell, reminded general managers that more than ever they needed to reaffirm their commitment to the company's founding principles as a people-oriented business dedicated to individualized, personal service. Mitchell recognized that Avon's rapid global growth strained Avon's basic philosophy of catering to individual women, and thus made it more important than ever to "...keep the human values of Avon in front."⁴⁴⁶ He concluded by applauding "Avon's men" for their sensitivity and intelligence.⁴⁴⁷ Mitchell's underlying message echoed those of Avon's forefathers who created a discourse that positioned direct-selling as a benevolent, people-centered business opportunity that helped women profit emotionally and financially.⁴⁴⁸ As the world's oldest direct-selling organization, Avon's male managers in the 1973 refined its rhetoric of economic uplift to appeal to women

Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde Hair and Blue Eyed."

⁴⁴⁶ "Presidential Address" by David Mitchell in *1973 World Management Conference*, RG I: Series 1: Administration, Subseries C: Conferences, 1973-1987, Box 4.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁴⁸ As discussed in previous chapters, direct-selling organizations have relied and thrived on creating a business model that differs from the organizational management, labor, and culture of other industries, making them especially appealing for women. See Nicole Biggart Woolsey *Charismatic Capitalism*.

inside and outside the United States as universally desirable and achievable in the global marketplace.⁴⁴⁹

By the 1970s direct selling organizations encountered their own regionally specific obstacles.⁴⁵⁰ Government intervention, increasing concerns about ethical business practices, and pressure from consumer rights organizations were not limited to the United States. As the world's largest direct selling organization, Avon was especially invested in promoting direct selling as honest business practice that served women around the world, a concern Mitchell emphasized in his keynote speech for the inaugural meeting of the World Congress of Direct Selling Companies in 1972. McConnell encouraged neophyte members of the World Congress to adopt a code of ethics similar to the American Direct Selling Association and to form proactive alliances with consumer groups and government officials in their individual countries.⁴⁵¹ Much like Avon's response to the ethnic pride movement, McConnell explained that companies owed it to their consumers to behave morally and ethically. Doing so, he emphasized, would earn their trust and their business. He also made it clear that the more direct-selling companies were seen as universally accepted and trusted, the more opportunities they had to recruit and distribute their wares in emerging markets.

When combined with the gendered discourse of "compassionate capitalism" Avon developed and refined for its international general managers, the 1970s marked a decade where Avon's male executives operated and produced a distinctly gendered discourse as they planned for Avon Product, Inc.'s continued expansion. Direct-selling was seen as both the key to

⁴⁴⁹ Ara Wilson notes this also applied to Avon's operations in Thailand. See Ara Wilson, "The Empire of Direct Sales and the Making of Thai Entrepreneurs." *Critique of Anthropology* 19 (1999), 402.

⁴⁵⁰ "Key Note Speech" by David Mitchell at World Congress of Direct Selling Companies at Montreal, Canada, May 22, 1972. RG II, Series 4: Selling Methods/Sales Aids, Box 117.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

generating consumer demand with its intimate, one-on-one interactions and product demonstrations. By the 1970s, however, executives also began discussing it as a distinctly feminized form of economic opportunity Avon could market to women around the world. By proclaiming to provide women the opportunity to earn additional income, in addition to modernizing their personal beauty and hygiene practices, Avon recognized the power of women's personal connections in creating new market demands for Avon's products. This raises an additional set of questions: Where did Avon's future ventures lead it and what does it tell us about how Avon conceptualized and viewed women in developing countries?

Selling: Economic Uplift Around the World

Over the next several years Avon refined this discourse as it sought business in developing and underdeveloped countries. In 1978 Avon generated two billion dollars in worldwide sales as a result of over one million representatives in 25 countries.⁴⁵² Approximately 700,000 of these representatives worked outside the United States in Avon's new subsidiaries, in New Zealand, Thailand, and Ivory Coast; when it acquired DOI, a cosmetics manufacturer in Philippines, one of largest markets in Far East. Its 1978 Annual Report attributed Avon's global success as "...evidence of the growing acceptance of Avon's unique approach to personalized selling throughout the world," improvements to its marketing and field operations; and the increasing customer support and quality assurance standards it used around the world.⁴⁵³ It also marked the point where Avon increasingly began promoting itself, at least to its stockholders, as the kind of business that foreign countries welcomed, a difference it implied made Avon unique in its 1978 Annual Report: "The circumstances that have made the Avon earning opportunity

⁴⁵² Approximately 700,000 of these representatives worked outside the United States in Avon's 25 international subsidiaries, in New Zealand, Thailand, and Ivory Coast; acquired DOI and manufacturer in Philippines, one of largest markets in Far East.

⁴⁵³ 1978 Avon Annual Report, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1

appealing to women in the United States also exist in other countries of the world. Because our way of doing business provides local people with an opportunity to earn, we are welcome wherever we go.”⁴⁵⁴

During the 1970s Avon continued to equate direct selling with a uniquely democratic way for women to earn money and participate in Avon’s beauty culture and community. In theory, any woman, regardless of race, educational training, or pedigree could benefit from Avon’s system, assuming she had enough money to pay Avon’s order taking fee and had the time, energy, and personal contacts to cultivate “her own business.” Even today, the World Federation of Direct Selling Associations touts the strength of its system in “... providing accessible business opportunities to people looking for alternative sources of income, and whose entry is generally not restricted by gender, age, education, or previous experience.”⁴⁵⁵ Avon’s male manager saw themselves as overseeing an organization that could serve the needs of all women, regardless of the languages they spoke or the countries where they resided. In 1978, Avon opened subsidiaries in Paraguay, Malaysia, and Chile.⁴⁵⁶ Drawing on its experience producing cosmetics and skin care products for African Americans and women of color in the United States, it also began operations in Nigeria and Ivory Coast with the hope of adding two African markets per year, except for South Africa, where Avon executives noted its apartheid government clashed with Avon’s progressive image and values.⁴⁵⁷ As its 1978 *Annual Report* noted, “Because people are basically alike the world over, they have same wants and the same needs. And since the Avon experience relates directly to many of these feelings, it has become,

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁵⁵ “What is Direct Selling?” World Federation of Direct Selling Associations. Accessed November 19, 2009. Available at http://www.wfdsa.org/about_dir_sell/index.cfm?fa=direct_sub2.

⁴⁵⁶ 1978 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1.

⁴⁵⁷ “Avon Calling on Bazie to Head Drive in Africa,” *New York Times* 1978, D2.

in effect, a common worldwide language.”⁴⁵⁸ The lingua franca of the “Avon experience” still revolved around many of the same ideologies and premises espoused by the men who sought to introduce Avon to every home in the “free world” during the 1950s.

With the aid of the local women it enlisted to espouse its civilizing mission, Avon promoted the sale and consumption of its beauty products as modern, innovative, and guaranteed to help women look and feel better. It also advertised itself as an opportunity for women to “grow” their own business, be their own boss, and control their financial destiny. As discussed earlier, the reality of women’s economic independence in the United States was a dubious claim for Avon to export, considering that few women relied on Avon as a primary source of income. This statement also erases, or at least reframes, Avon’s history in the 1950s and 1960s of positioning the work of an Avon Lady as a social responsibility where women served their fellow mothers, wives, and family caretakers. In reality, Avon viewed all women, regardless of their nationality or cultural background, as potential distributors and consumers in the making. This strategy had less to do with its desire to deliver genuine economic opportunities to women and more with its ability to adapt and capitalize on changes in the global and local economies that left women in search of additional ways to support themselves and their families. Ara Wilson argues that the individual distributors who constitute the majority of the labor in direct sales organizations exemplify a post-Fordist economy with its decentralized and flexible labor strategies, making it particularly suited to expand globally: ⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁸ 1978 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 13.

⁴⁵⁹ Specifically, Wilson builds on David Harvey’s argument and notes that “...direct sales offers one of a variety of old-time economic strategies, like piece-work, that modern companies employ to adapt to markets through greater decentralization, labor flexibility, elastic marketing, and global reach.” See Ara Wilson, “The Empire of Direct Sales and the Making of Thai Entrepreneurs,” 407.

Direct selling achieves its global expansion by casting individuals as corporate agents and tapping their personal networks for profit. In doing so, it applies ‘alternative’ capitalist discourses about individual entrepreneurial possibilities to an established business strategy of global expansion, and extends the reach of its discourses to disparate social realms...⁴⁶⁰

Around the world, this Post-Fordist economy also influenced and reconfigured gendered divisions of labor as women were increasingly targeted, recruited and constructed as laborers for skilled and unskilled jobs.⁴⁶¹ There is no doubt that the circumstances that shaped women’s economic livelihoods varied significantly across Asia, Africa, and South America and other regions of the global south where Avon turned its attention at the end of the 1970s. As the Cuban Revolution showed in 1961, not all countries welcomed Avon’s brand of liberal ideology that equated women’s dreams with their ability to successfully sell lipstick and perfume.⁴⁶² Despite this, by 1978 Avon seemed to recognize that its growth hinged on recruiting women in the developing world and tapping into their various social networks as their standards of living and gendered consumption patterns adapted or were disrupted by multinational firms that increasingly employed them and converted them into loyal consumers.⁴⁶³ It is impossible to know from the archives the specific training and motivational incentives Avon provided representatives in these new markets, but according to its Annual Reports, Avon consistently promoted and celebrated when women embraced “Western” (or U.S.) inspired beauty practices and behaviors. More often than not, Avon framed local women themselves as generating a demand for its services, rather framing itself as imposing itself on unwilling local populations.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 407.

⁴⁶¹ Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy : Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean*, (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶² Avon’s history in Cuba was rarely, if ever mentioned in official accounts of its international expansion following the government takeover of its manufacturing plant in 1961.

⁴⁶³ Timothy Burke’s exploration on the commodification of cleanliness and hygiene by commercial advertisers in Zimbabwe in the 1960s and 1970s examines the various intersections between colonial discourses of the body, race, gender, and notions of civility local advertising and marketing professionals mediated. See Burke, Chapter 5, “The New Mission,” in *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*.

This may indeed be true, given that the only way Avon profited was if its volunteer labor force of female distributors actively marketed and sold its products. Along the way, however, Avon continued to invest heavily in recruiting, training and managing its new representatives and inoculating them with Avon's "spirit" and promise to make their dreams come true.

Economic uplift remained the cornerstone of Avon's recruitment ideology, a strategy that helped it generate consumer demand at the most local of levels by inserting itself into women's private lives and relationships. Avon's geographic expansion during the 1970s mimicked the trajectory of other multinational corporations based in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan.⁴⁶⁴ Like Avon, many of these companies focused on creating new markets for cosmetics – or- replacing traditional or craftsman beauty and toiletry preparations with mass produced dental, hygiene, cosmetics, and other personal care products. In 1977, Colgate-Palmolive, a U.S.-based company that produced dental products, along with cosmetics and toiletries, was the world's largest personal care company. Avon followed as a close second with over one billion dollars in sales, 41 percent of which it generated outside the United States.⁴⁶⁵

Local women still proved to be Avon's most important resources and provided Avon unfettered access to women's various grooming and beauty habits around the world, as well as social networks from which it could continually solicit new recruits.⁴⁶⁶ Despite the centrally-coordinated and locally executed marketing strategies Avon developed as a new multinational

⁴⁶⁴ Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, C.1945-C.1980.

⁴⁶⁵ Japan's Shiseido company was third and followed by Revlon, whose sales in the United States surpassed Avon's but had not yet been fully developed. These figures are based on Appendix 2 in Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed?," 154.

⁴⁶⁶ As discussed in Chapter 3, the global marketing of U.S. commercial beauty aids and the export of Hollywood starlets have been received and adapted to local cultural, gendered, and political contexts in markets around the world. Stephen Gundle, for example, notes how a specific version of U.S., Hollywood glamour helped encourage mass consumption in Italy following World War II, although he is quick to note that Italian women both adopted and adapted this U.S. rooted system. See Stephen Gundle, "Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 3 (2002): 95-118.

corporation in 1973, Avon Ladies around the world continued to navigate the local variances, attitudes, and social conventions that guided women's beauty practices. Avon Ladies drove Avon's expanding beauty empire that centered around notions of individual entrepreneurialism and unlimited earning potential. Now, however, Avon's geographically scattered, female labor force worked for a multinational corporation whose senior male managers coordinated their efforts across time and space to manage, monitor, and motivate them as they embarked on their careers as "independent" business women.

Like in the United States, a diverse spectrum of women within various Avon markets, regions, territories, and neighborhoods worked as Avon representatives. According to its 1978 Annual Report, representatives in the Pacific represented the most ethnically diverse of Avon's regional sales forces. In Malaysia, Avon printed brochures in Malay, Chinese, and English. Despite these regional differences, Avon's overarching ideology still promoted beauty within a Westernized discourse that linked female beauty with the consumption of commercial beauty aids. For example, in anticipation of its new subsidiary in the Philippines, Avon's Annual report noted that their "...westernized outlook and a prosperous economy" left Avon optimistic about opportunities for growth.⁴⁶⁷ Soon after, Brazil emerged as one of Avon's largest and most promising markets, followed by subsidiaries in El Salvador, Uruguay, Senegal, and Liberia. In 1979 Avon opened a subsidiary in Saudi Arabia, its first venture in the Middle East. By the end of the 1970s, Avon's male managers belief that direct-selling was a democratic enterprise that could be implemented anywhere in the world seemed to ring true, and in 1979, Avon's international sales surpassed those in the United States for the first time in its history.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ 1978 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 13.

⁴⁶⁸ 1980 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1,

Managing and motivating women through its locally managed field operation divisions remained the primary focus of Avon's global operations. Because the archive does not include materials for its international (or domestic) sales force after the mid 1970s, it is difficult to ascertain how geographically specific strategies evolved and/or were adapted for Avon's new subsidiaries in the developing world.⁴⁶⁹ Its transnational system of recruiting, managing, and training new representatives appears similar what it developed during its early international forays in the 1950s and 1960s. Local female district and zone managers recruited a variety of women to address regional and local ethnic, religious, or cultural differences, while Avon Ladies attended sales meetings where they received Avon's transnational instructions and sales advice about Avon's new products and beauty innovations. In markets where Avon pioneered new beauty or hygiene trends, representatives also probably received instructional literature detailing the "do's" and "don'ts" of color cosmetics usage and contemporary beauty trends. Like its early efforts in Latin America, Avon generally developed products in the United States but adapted colors, names, and packaging to needs and culturally—specific preferences of women in individual subsidiaries. Local beauty preferences and tastes still guided local product marketing and promotion efforts.⁴⁷⁰ The flexibility of Avon's direct selling system and its reliance on local women still enabled it to adapt its products, techniques, and appeal to women and families across geographic and geopolitical divides. As a result Avon's expanding sales force delivered Avon's product samples, training, and messages of achievable beauty in "contact zones" to a new generation of ethnically diverse and geographically scattered Avon customers around the world.

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⁴⁶⁹ I recognize this is a much needed and critical facet of Avon's international expansion, especially given its aggressive entry in the developing world at this time. Outside of Japan, few materials in the archive document its entry in Asia and there is no record of any of its ventures in Africa or the Middle East.

⁴⁷⁰ *1978 Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1.

Avon Products, Inc. also strove to create a sense of community and individual achievement as Avon entered new markets. Anniversary specials and group goal setting reaffirmed women's collective membership in Avon, while reward programs continued to recognizing women's individual achievements. Honoring individual achievement also remained a transnational management strategy. According to its 1979 Annual Report, most subsidiaries implemented Presidents Club to recognize their top earning representatives and refined the promotional events and prizes to women's culturally specific tastes.⁴⁷¹ While Avon representatives in the United States visited customers every two weeks, Avon's international markets usually operated on a three week selling cycles where Avon representatives sold and delivered over 150 different products. Beauty trends and technological innovation in the United States remained the driving force behind the products local Avon representatives sold and distributed. Japanese women were especially interested in skin care, a cultural influence that Avon used when it launched *Stay Fair*, "...a special summer skin care line created exclusively for the Japanese market [that] was very well received."⁴⁷² Women in the United Kingdom liked in bath products, talc, while fragrances *Emprise and Everest* were the top selling products in Mexico.⁴⁷³

Maximizing its person to person distribution system, harnessing the power of women's social networks, and easing itself into other local bartering and trade systems also helped Avon thrive in markets where extensive retail infrastructure had yet to be developed in the 1970s until the 1990s. As Avon neared the end of the decade, over one million representatives distributed Avon's perfumes, powders, and lipsticks around the world.⁴⁷⁴ Avon's class of senior male

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 22

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ 1978 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1.

executives managed its highly personalized, yet centrally coordinated direct-selling system while local women in regions around the world were encouraged to see themselves as members in a organization that rewarded their entrepreneurial spirit. According to its 1978 *Annual Report*, Avon credited its representatives for keeping the spirit of the individual at the core of Avon's expanding global beauty business, "While every member of the Avon family played an important part in this unprecedented growth, fundamental to it remains the contribution of close to one million Representatives whose personal service brought Avon products to 65 million customers around the world: an accomplishment."

By 1980, \$1.24 billion dollars in Avon sales outside the United States surpassed its original domestic market that sold \$1.17 billion.⁴⁷⁵ Yet, the ideologies that permeated Avon's transnational recruitment literature and internal culture continued to draw on U.S. centered notions of individualism that linked women's inherent right to sell, consume, and achieve Avon's democratic version of beauty. Despite its international expansion, Avon entered the 1980s in a particularly precarious financial state. By 1978, its stock had fallen to \$20-\$30 a share, a significant slide from its high of \$140 in 1972. Increasing competition from retail and discount stores, combined with the number of women who continued to seek full time employment outside their homes, posed additional concerns in the United States, which still remained Avon's largest single market. In 1983, longtime CEO and Avon leader David Mitchell stepped down as President, and was replaced with Hick Waldron, whose upper-level management experience at RJ Reynolds was expected to usher in a new era of leadership.⁴⁷⁶ Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Avon acquired a number of jewelry, fashion, and direct sales companies believed to be compatible and lucrative additions to its beauty businesses.

⁴⁷⁵ 1980 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1, 5 & 7.

⁴⁷⁶ 1984 *Avon Annual Report*, Series 1: Admin: Subseries A: Annual Reports, 1941-1996, Box 1.

In less than a decade Avon acquired and sold high-end jewelry Tiffany & Company; Geni Fashions, a plastic house wares company that utilized home party sales system; Family Fashions, a direct-mail clothing company, and a door-to-door magazine subscription company.⁴⁷⁷ In 1982 Hicks Waldron announced the company's plan to extend its operations in the health care industry, a move he described as being compatible with Avon's "culture of caring."⁴⁷⁸ Between 1982 and 1985, Avon also acquired Mallinckrodt Inc., medical equipment and chemical company; as well as Foster Medical and the Mediplex Group that specialized in at-home care and retirement communities.

Despite a decade of promises and optimism, these acquisitions proved to be financial missteps and by 1988, Avon was 1.2 billion dollars in debt. Its internal culture of masculine leadership had implemented any significant changes to reconcile the limited leadership roles and executive position for women it had pledged to in the 1970s. By the late 980s, had only managed to appointment one more woman to its Board of Directors and a handful of others to senior management positions. Between 1984 and 1988, three women served on Avon's board of directors; thirteen held senior management positions; and one served as the lone group Vice President and directed the U.S. sales force.⁴⁷⁹

Recognizing it needed a change, Avon's Board returned to its internal pool of executive leadership and in 1988, James Preston, who had worked at Avon since 1971, assumed Hicks Waldron's role as President. Preston announced a "back to basics" approach and a renewed emphasis on Avon's beauty business, calling it 'Avon's heritage and strength.'⁴⁸⁰ In addition to inheriting Avon's debt, Preston assumed responsibility for Avon's corporate image problem that

⁴⁷⁷ Klepacki, *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 33.

had resulted from years of advertising cutbacks in the early 1980s; a disgruntled U.S. sales force with an alarming turnover rate; and the financial implications of an increasing number of women working full-timed salaried positions, a setback Preston admitted, “We were slow to pick up on the changing trend and its implications for Avon.”⁴⁸¹ One of the first significant changes Preston launched was expanding the ways U.S. customers could purchase Avon products. By refashioning Avon’s neighborhood territory system and encouraging women to sell Avon at work or from any other number of places, including full time jobs, that their increasingly mobile lives took them, Preston finally pushed Avon into recognizing that the era of serving women in their homes was over. By 1992, the *Avon Select* program allowed customers in the United States to order products through their sales representatives, mail order catalogs, or via telephone or fax.⁴⁸²

The strength of Avon’s direct selling system and demand for its beauty products and fragrances were the one area of Avon’s business that continued to generate revenue for the company in the mid 1980s, making Avon an appealing acquisition for two of its direct-selling competitors, Mary Kay and Amway. Between 1989 and 1991, both Mary Kay (through business group Chartwell and Associates), and Amway had acquired enough shares of Avon’s publicly sold stock to pose a hostile takeover attempts.⁴⁸³ In a highly publicized fight played out in U.S. financial press, James Preston declared Avon was not for sale, and the company filed a preemptive law suit in New York’s federal district court with the hopes of blocking Amway and

⁴⁸¹ Christine Tienery, “Avon Products in Pink after Makeover.” *The Globe and Mail* February 5 1987; Klepacki, *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*, 33.

⁴⁸² Klepacki, *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*, 37.

⁴⁸³ See Michael Frietag, “Amway Pullout Sends Avon Stock Reeling.” *New York Times*, May 19 1989, 3.

its primary investor, Irwin Jacobs, from acquiring any more stock.⁴⁸⁴ As a more direct form of protest, Avon enlisted the aid of its representatives and encouraged them to mount a letter writing campaign to protest Amway's attempted takeover.⁴⁸⁵ Not long after Avon defeated Amway's takeover attempt, it faced a similar public battle with Mary Kay. The battle between Mary Kay/Chartwell Associates and Avon was particularly messy that resulted in Avon hiring Kroll Associates to collect incriminating information on Mary Kay's chief financial officer, John Rochon. Oddly enough, these efforts included going through dumpsters outside Mary Kay's headquarters, and Mary Kay officially withdrew its offer in 1991.⁴⁸⁶

In 1992 Preston convened a task force of Avon's leading executives from around the world to help define Avon's mission as it prepared to resurrect the company from financial straits and a damaged image. After days of brainstorming Preston announced Avon's new vision: "To be the company that best understands and satisfies the product, service, and self-fulfillment needs of women- globally." But what does it mean for a company run by Western men to declare itself being best able to satisfy and serve women globally? More importantly, how does this happen on a global scale? In many ways, Preston's vision statement has been the launching point for this project. The previous chapters have investigated these questions from a variety of historical moments and locales. This final section examines Avon's 1992 vision statement the context of its transnational and domestic history

⁴⁸⁴ The claim also accused Amway of unethical conduct and highlighted its unresolved criminal and civil charges in multiple U.S. states and Canada. See Robert Cole, "Avon Offer Is Official: Amway Bids \$39 a Share." *New York Times*, May 11 1989.

⁴⁸⁵ Klepacki, 37.

⁴⁸⁶ Noted by a 1991 article in *Business Week*, "Dumpster Raids? That's Not Very Ladylike, Avon." *Business Week*, April 1 1991 available at <http://www.businessweek.com/archives/1991/b320621.arc.htm>.

Celebrating a Company for Women

Upon meeting with executives from around the world, in 1992 James Preston set Avon on a new trajectory as it neared the end of the twentieth century. The fact that Preston and Avon's managers described Avon's new statement as a vision statement, rather than as a mere mission statement underscores the degree to which Avon's executives recognized the power of global branding and celebrating women as the cornerstone of their business. Openly discussing, and capitalizing on the "feminine" business of selling Avon finally made its way to the President's agenda and Preston and his team of global executives identified the cultural meanings and associations Avon executives would develop and promote as the defining features of Avon's corporate image for the next decade. He explained the rationale to Avon's stockholders in its 1992 Annual Report:

We are, unique among major corporations, a woman's company. We sell our products to, for, and through women. We understand their needs and preferences better than most. This understanding should guide our basic business and influence our choice of new business opportunities.⁴⁸⁷

And yet, as Preston noted in an interview years later, Avon was still a company dominated by male executives and a corporate culture rooted in a good-ole boy network. The collaborative vision statement Avon executives created in 1992 does not exist in a vacuum but drew on years of advertising, public relations, and outreach efforts designed to keep Avon's corporate persona and values relative to the changing context of women's lives.⁴⁸⁸ Avon's senior male executives

⁴⁸⁷ A quoted in Klepacki, *Avon: Building the Premier Company for Women*, 47.

⁴⁸⁸ Up until this point, I have relied on historian Roland Marchand's framework to contextualize Avon's evolving corporate persona, especially the extensive public relations efforts, beginning with its institutional service advertisements Avon developed for World War II and later refined during the Cold War culture of domestic containment. Within this framework, companies' public relations department helped "remove the taint of selfishness" as their increasing power and unprecedented size intervened in American family, religious and civic life and caused many Americans to question their social legitimacy. Marchand's study is particularly helpful in explaining the skill and strategies public relations departments developed during and immediately following World

tried, and for the most, succeeded in crafting a family-like image for the general public and the representatives who worked on its behalf from its founding in 1886. This face of Avon was neither stable nor static as noted in previous chapters, yet it was always feminized and oriented towards Avon's female consumers. It was also shaped by women behind the scenes who ran Avon's public relations department from the early 1900s to the 1960s.⁴⁸⁹ The image Avon crafted for itself as an organization, as well as that of the Avon Lady evolved with the social and political climate in the United States at home, as well as to the needs of its international subsidiaries. In the previous chapters, I have attempted to isolate key moments in Avon's transnational history that have intersected with broader discourses of race, gender, nationhood, and social class to refashion how Avon talked about itself to its employees and how it represented itself to consumers. When Avon's archive is analyzed within a Foucauldian lens, it is clear that historically-specific, unstable, yet highly productive discursive formations helped inform Preston's vision of Avon as a company that represented and served women around the world.⁴⁹⁰ These evolving discourses had specific and historically-relevant consequences. Avon's evolving public relations activities, advertising campaigns, and recruitment slogans from the 1950s to the 1980s illustrate moments of cultural friction in the United States required Avon to reevaluate how it represented and spoke about itself to the American public. Some social movements like the ethnic pride movement and grassroots organization, Operation PUSH, challenged Avon to reevaluate its relationship with ethnic minorities and resulted in a new discourse of diversity that permeated Avon's internal workplace culture and external media

War II that presented large corporations as friends, neighbors, and "even family members" to convince the American public they were a central pillar to the United State's economic stability and prosperity. Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 2.

⁴⁸⁹ See Chapter 1. Anna J. Figsbee, a New York socialite ran Avon's public relations as a subset of its advertising department from the early 1930s until the early 1960s when Avon established a separate Public Relations Department with Alla O'Brien.

⁴⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1st American ed., (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1972)

campaigns. Other social movements, like the women's liberation movement, required Avon to alter representations of the Avon Lady and liberate her from her symbolic connection to her home, yet failed to reconfigure the internal gendered and sexist divides that governed Avon's organizational culture and upper-level management. These events, however, were not limited to Avon's domestic operations. Avon's move to creating a multi-cultural, progressive corporate image began in the United States but can also be seen in ethnically diverse print advertisements and sales catalogues individual subsidiaries created around the world. Avon's birth as an official multi-national corporation also had productive consequences. Most notably, Avon Products, Inc. adapted its discourse of direct-selling as a form of compassionate capitalism and economic uplift to justify and drive its expanding operations in new and emerging developing markets.

Avon's 1992 vision statement coincided with another key moment in Avon's transnational history. During his early tenure, James Preston also discovered and later hired Avon's current CEO and Board Chairman, Andrea Jung, who became Avon's first woman to serve as Avon's President in 1999. Jung's retail experience at Bloomingdales made her an ideal consultant to investigate Avon's options in the retail market. Soon after, Jung was recruited as a full time executive and charged with redesigning Avon's color cosmetics packing. A couple years and several promotions later, she emerged as the driving force behind Avon's global marketing campaigns. Between 1992 and 1996, Jung initiated and led a number of efforts to help Avon consolidate its global brand image, which included consolidating Avon's advertising, public relations, sampling, and merchandising strategies.⁴⁹¹

As Executive Vice President and President of Avon's Global Marketing and New Business Division, Jung pushed for streamlining Avon's over extended product lines into more

⁴⁹¹ Avon also created a global management program for executives around the world; focused on its customer support systems around the world, and committed itself to global corporate responsibility. *1996 Annual Report*

recognizable global brands (e.g. Anew, Avon Color, etc.).⁴⁹² Anew was launched as Avon's first official global skin care brand in 1996.⁴⁹³ A Global Product Council comprised of 35 Avon executives from around the world helped ensure consistency in product packaging, formulas, and brand image, as well as to ensure regional preferences for Avon's global beauty products were taken into account.⁴⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Avon created a global management training program for its executives, extended its customer care operations around the world and began planning how to expand its Corporate Social Responsibility program globally. It also investigated the new possibilities, and potential setbacks, of using the Internet to sell its products directly to consumers, as well as integrating technology into representatives' order taking system.⁴⁹⁵

Upon James Preston's retirement, Avon's Board of Directors passed over Jung and other high ranking female executives when they appointed Charles Perrin as its new CEO in 1998. Eighteen months later, Perrin abruptly retired before the end of his contract and as a headline in the *New York Times* aptly declared, "Opportunity Re-Knocks at Avon: Passed over before, a Woman Is Names Chief Executive." It took Avon's Board of Directors several years to catch up with its vision statement, but in 1999, Andrea Jung became the first woman, and only ethnic minority, to be elected as Chief Executive Officer of Avon Products, Inc.⁴⁹⁶ The vision statement Avon's senior leaders had articulated in 1992 planted the seeds that would later reposition Avon as a global brand that represented something more than multinational cosmetics corporation. This final chapter explores the evolution of Avon's corporate persona into a

⁴⁹² 1996 *Avon Annual Report*, 8.

⁴⁹³ *Avon Outlook*, March/April 1997.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 8.

⁴⁹⁵ David Godes, "Avon.Com (a)." *Harvard Business School Case Studies*, no. HBS 503-016 (2003): Harvard Business Online, <http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu>.

⁴⁹⁶ Dana Canedy, "Opportunity Re-Knocks at Avon: Passed over before, a Woman Is Names Chief Executive." *New York Times*, November 5 1999.

“branded” identity as “the company for women” that would pervade, unify, and drive its expansion into the twenty first century.

The Avon Vision: to be the company that best understands and satisfies the product, service and self-fulfillment needs of women—globally.
-Avon Products, Inc. Vision Statement

Chapter 7: Avon: “The” Company for Women, 1992-2010:

During Avon’s first four decades the company’s global expansion was powered by its female sales force whom it trained to show and sell its U.S. inspired beauty habits and consumption practices. By the early 1990s, however, with the arrival of the information revolution, multinational companies harnessed the power of new communication technology to synergize and locally tailor their advertising campaigns for consumers around the world. Avon’s strategy of “cultural branding” reflected its entry into this brave new electronic world. Until the mid 1990s, the term “branding” at Avon was reserved for its products, rather than a process that applied to the company’s image. Yet since its founding, Avon has been heavily invested in crafting a corporate persona, or a brand identity, for itself. Former Avon President Jim Preston’s vision statement in 1992 set the stage for a new kind of image-making to streamline Avon’s emerging identity as a “woman’s company,” one that he hoped would distinguish Avon from its competitors in the global marketplace and transcend geographic, economic, and cultural borders as Avon continued expand its operations in the developing world.⁴⁹⁷ Today Avon’s vision statement has evolved into a five-pronged mission to be: a global beauty leader; women’s choice

⁴⁹⁷ Many multinational companies recognized the power of branding as they sought to expand in new markets in the 1990s. Nike’s rise to global fame and fortune is often cited as one of the most powerful and successful global brands, as it harnessed the power of expanded communication technology and global advertising campaigns to transform itself from an athletic goods company into an aspirational lifestyle that consumers around the world clamored to recreate by purchasing Air Jordans. For a historical study of Nike’s lifestyle branding, see Walter LaFeber’s, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. New and expanded ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002). Other cultural critics like Naomi Klein, argue that lifestyle branding enabled corporations to legitimize their increasing presences in the public sphere; distanced consumers from recognizing where and how their goods were produced, and ultimately helped explain shift of manufacturing jobs to export processing zones. See Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, 1st Picador USA ed., (New York: Picador, 2000).

for buying; the premier direct seller; the best place to work; the largest women's foundation; and the most admired company.⁴⁹⁸

Avon: The Company for Women in the 21st Century

A number of scholars and business practitioners have examined the cultural dimensions of branding and its implications for driving the marketing, sale, and consumption of consumer goods in the advent of globalization. Within these debates, media and cultural studies scholars have suggested that brands operate as cultural texts or signs which can be deconstructed, read, or decoded to identify their mass appeal and to analyze the social relations embedded in their mass production and consumption.⁴⁹⁹ From this framework, Avon's efforts to align itself as a "woman's" company can be interpreted as a "brand" of beauty that represents and speaks to women's collective desire to support one another through the personalized system of direct-selling. As discussed previously, these messages have shifted from a service-oriented message for white consumers in the 1950s and 1960s to messages of economic-uplift and opportunity by the 1970s, both of which I have argued that to some degree, mask the labor women perform as direct selling distributors. When viewed in a historical context, one can see how different discourses of race, gender, and nation influenced Avon's evolving brand identity. In this final chapter, I suggest that Avon is more than a sign; it is also fluid, flexible corporate identity that

⁴⁹⁸ See Avon's corporate website, "What we Stand For: Our Vision and Mission." Accessed April 6, 2010, Available at <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-13-Our-Vision-and-Mission>.

⁴⁹⁹ This semiotic- based approach is often utilized in media and cultural studies scholarship. For an overview see Marcel Danesi, *Brands*, Routledge Introductions to Media and Communications, (New York ; London: Routledge, 2006). Ceila Lury and Scott Lash examine the social relations of global brands as central to both the global economy and global mass culture in *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

has – and continues to be - carefully reformulated and managed to encompass Avon’s increasingly diverse consumer base and transnational network of representatives.⁵⁰⁰

Avon’s 1992 vision statement, “to be the company that best understands and satisfies the product, service and self-fulfillment needs of women—globally,” produced a modified discourse that put women and economic empowerment at the center of Avon’s brand identity and marks another key moment in Avon’s transnational history.⁵⁰¹ One place where we see evidence of this process is in Avon’s 1994 promotional video, “Avon Answering the Call of Women Around the World,” an homage to representatives from over 120 countries who sold Avon’s products. The female narrator opened by explaining, “Avon is a world beyond borders where friendship and business go hand in hand. And where nearly two million women experience the satisfaction of personal and economic growth.”⁵⁰² By 1994, more women wore Avon cosmetics than any other brand on earth and read the Avon brochure more than any other catalogue. Representatives from Japan, Mexico and China described how Avon helped them meet people and make new friends, while the female narrator reminded viewers that “All a woman needs is an opportunity to go as far as her dreams will take her, to start a business and a better way of life.”⁵⁰³ While the camera showed panoramic shots of ethnically and generationally diverse women in a variety of settings,

⁵⁰⁰ According to Grant McCracken, branding is a “meaning transfer” or “meaning movement process” as companies actively survey and incorporate consumers’ beliefs and values as they construct brand identities for their products and themselves. McCracken defines brand as bundles or containers of meanings that add value to the consumer.” This approach accounts for the movement of Avon’s brand identity across geographic, economic, and culturally diverse regions of the world. See McCracken, Grant. “The Value of a Brand: An Anthropological Approach.” In *Brand Equity and Advertising Advertising’s Role in Building Brands*, edited by David and Alexander Biel Aaker, 125-42, (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Hillsbaum & Associates, 1993), 126.

⁵⁰¹ See Appendix A for Avon’s mission and vision statements.

⁵⁰² “Avon: Answering the Call Around the World,” 1994, Avon Product, Inc. Pictorial Collection. Box 56.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

the narrator drove home Avon's new woman's-centered identity by declaring that more women "...have changed their lives through Avon more than any other career opportunity."⁵⁰⁴

The video built on Avon's previous strategy of touting itself as a life-changing experience and presented a world where women's personal and economic growth was unlimited, regardless of age, ethnicity, nationality, or economic circumstances. Avon was a world where women could commune around the shared economic opportunities of buying and selling Avon's products, while also reaping individual rewards, both financially and aesthetically, from their efforts. Avon had moved past marketing the idea that women owed it to themselves and deserved to be beautiful, or that commercial beauty aids would help them achieve their dreams. Now, being beautiful and selling Avon's beauty products were presented as economic solidarity and empowerment. By 1992, had successfully transitioned to marketing itself as a transnational solution to women's collective economic, emotional, and physical well-being.

Avon's public relations efforts in the United States lent an added visibility to its new woman-centered social mission when it launched its women's health care initiative program and enlisted 500,000 U.S. representatives to sell pink ribbon products to support breast cancer awareness in 1993. It followed a few years later by sponsoring Avon's Global Women's Running Circuit.⁵⁰⁵ The move to synergize Avon's brand identity supported its increasing interest and expansion in the developing world. By 1997, more than 40 percent of Avon's sales came from what it called "new and emerging markets."⁵⁰⁶ Avon's entry in China, Russia, and India were considered particularly valuable given their geographic size and economies of scale. Forty years after Avon's early forays in Latin America, company research showed that Avon

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ See "The Avon Company History" on Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/about/firsts.html>. Accessed March 8, 2010.

⁵⁰⁶ "Eye on the Bottom Line: How Avon's strategies are really paying off," *Avon Outlook*, March/April, 1997.

possessed over one third of the Latin American color cosmetics and fragrance markets, and almost a quarter of the skin care market.⁵⁰⁷ In Asia, operations in Taiwan, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, and Thailand had increased rapidly during the 1990s as Avon adapted its direct-selling operations to include franchised beauty boutiques in Malaysia and retail distribution in Taiwanese drugstores.⁵⁰⁸ In Central Europe, the fall of the Iron Curtain presented a number of new opportunities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, which Avon described as economies as “...characterized by powerful pent-up demand for Western quality consumer products.”⁵⁰⁹

Andrea Jung’s appointment to Avon President in 1998 and Chief Executive Officer in 1999 provided Avon with a new vision for global growth and female-inspired leadership. As discussed previously, Avon’s move to a more progressive, socially conscious company was seen as morally responsible and profitable beginning in the early 1970s when Avon sought to attract minorities to supplement its shrinking vanguard of white suburban housewives. It was also necessary for Avon to make itself an appealing opportunity for women of color around the world. Jung helped Avon generate a more unified and synergized brand identity with the launch of its first global advertising campaign in 1998, “Let’s Talk.”⁵¹⁰ Soon after, Avon solicited African-American tennis superstars, Venus and Serena Williams, as its first global celebrity spokespersons.⁵¹¹ That same year Avon launched its first 3-Day Walk for the Cure event in southern California to raise awareness for breast cancer. In 2004, Avon chose another world-famous woman of color, Mexican actress Selma Hayek, to launch its new

⁵⁰⁷ 1997 *Avon Annual Report*, “Growing in Developing Markets,” 3.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵¹⁰ 1999 *Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report* available at Avon’s corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010.

⁵¹¹ See “The Avon Company History” on Avon’s corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/about/firsts.html>.

domestic violence program, Speak Out Against Domestic Violence.⁵¹² Avon's move to present itself as a company that embraced and served women of all ethnic backgrounds in the 1970s had evolved to selecting world-famous, non-white celebrities to serve as its first global, celebrity endorsers.

By 2004, it was difficult to discern the separate but highly visible operations of Avon's public relations, advertising, and corporate philanthropy projects. This integrated approach reframed Avon's corporate identity from a direct selling company into an organization that rallied women around the social causes of women's health and economic empowerment. Avon has also increased its alliance with non-profit organizations dedicated to championing women's social causes. The philanthropic arm of Avon's occur through The Avon Foundation, which it describes as, "the largest corporate foundation for women in the world. Avon and the Avon Foundation have raised and awarded more than \$660 million to causes that are important to women and their families—breast cancer and domestic violence—as well as emergency and disaster relief, and we are proud to be change agents to improve women's lives."⁵¹³ Today, the Avon Foundation's efforts center primarily around Avon's Breast Cancer Crusade and Avon's Speak Out For Domestic Violence Program which began in Mexico in 2004.⁵¹⁴ Most recently, the Avon Foundation has mobilized Avon's "green army" of 6. 2 million sales representatives through education, fundraising, and joining the United Nation's Environment Plant for the Planet

⁵¹² See "The Avon Company History" on Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/about/firsts.html>. Accessed on March 8, 2010.

⁵¹³ "Avon Foundation Overview." Accessed April 6, 2010. Available at <http://www.avoncompany.com/women/avonfoundation/overview.html>.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. The program has since expanded to more than 50 countries.

Program, leading *Newsweek* magazine to rank Avon #25 on its inaugural list of America's greenest companies in 2009.⁵¹⁵

Avon has steadily expanded the Avon Foundations' visibility and economic contributions in the last fifty years, strengthening Avon's brand image as a "woman's company" that delivers more than cosmetics and individual economic opportunity. Positioning itself as social cause rather than a mere global manufacturer and marketer of commercial beauty products has emerged as a popular trend in the global beauty business. Unilever, the parent company for the popular Dove beauty brand, recently launched its "feminist" inspired "Real Beauty Campaign;" however, as Josee Johnson and Judith Taylor note, Dove positions women's empowerment as best achieved through "grooming and shopping," and by advocating a form "feminist consumerism" that differs from feminist grassroots and social organizations.⁵¹⁶

Like the Dove Campaign, Avon also positions women's empowerment within a corporate discourse where buying, selling, and consuming is pivotal to improving women's physical and emotional well being. But Avon also differs significantly from Unilever's appropriation of women's social issues. As a direct selling organization, a portion of Avon's revenue is rechanneled to representatives through their sales commissions and reward prizes. In 2009 Avon distributed six million dollars in commissions to Avon representatives around the world, a feat it sees as supporting women's microenterprise. According to Avon's website, "... we entrust over \$1 billion in products and credit to Representatives at any given time during the year. This

⁵¹⁵ "Hello Green Tomorrow." Accessed April 6, 2010. Available at <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-45-Hello-Green-Tomorrow>.

⁵¹⁶ Josee Johnston and Judith Taylor. "Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, no. 4 (2008): 955.

process enables many women, who otherwise might not have access to credit, to pursue their personal financial goals.”⁵¹⁷

Unlike Dove, the power of Avon’s female-centered branding strategy is less about its products or the hegemonic version of beauty it represents. Today, Avon’s branding centers on the economic opportunity it purports to provide women. Avon’s Senior Vice President of Marketing, William Susetka elaborated on this strategy by explaining: “That’s why I believe this model will live forever. There will always be a need for economic empowerment. There will always be someone to say, ‘I need a second income. I need a career.’”⁵¹⁸ Avon had found the magic ingredient. Unlike the 1970s when it did not immediately recognize the profound shift women seeking full time jobs would have on its sales or the U.S. economy, by the beginning of the twenty first century, Avon strategically developed a distinct brand of female empowerment that it could present as a universal solution for women disproportionately affected by the global economy. Growing divisions between the world’s rich and poor helped Avon continue to champion direct-sales, what Ara Wilson describes as “entrepreneurial self help within a corporate system,” that any woman can embrace. Drawing on grassroots feminist ideals to unite and motivate its global sales force has proven to be an effective strategy as Avon has expanded its operations in developing nations like China, Brazil and Russia and in established markets with volatile local economies. This final section explores this phenomena as it has played out in Argentina, a country whose economic hardships in the last decade has enabled Avon to both capitalize and profit from women’s economic alienation and financial hardships.

⁵¹⁷ Avon describes itself as one of the world’s largest drivers of women’s microenterprise since Avon sells representatives their products on credit. See “Corporate Responsibility: The Power of Microenterprise.” Accessed April 6, 2010. Available at <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-34-The-Power-of-Microenterprise>.

⁵¹⁸ Quoted in Chapter 10, “Connect with your Customers” in Klepacki’s *Avon: Building the World’s Premier Company for Women*, 176.

A Snapshot of Argentinean Beauty Culture

I decided to leave the archives and follow Avon to Argentina, a subsidiary it established in 1972 in the midst of massive political, economic, and social turmoil. I wanted to investigate how, and whether, Avon's brand image as "the company for women" worked outside the United States in a market plagued by economic upheavals and social changes in recent years. My research in August of 2008 consisted of participating and observing Argentina's cosmopolitan, commercial beauty culture; visiting Avon's retail store; and collecting material about Cosmetico Avon's advertising, public relations, and field operations. I studied Avon's brand identity in a local context to trace the various ideologies, values, and opportunities it sold to women in Argentina. I was curious, after over thirty five years of operating in Argentina, do women still buy and sell Avon? If so, how has Cosmetics Avon adapt its recruitment strategies given the massive economic and social upheavals in recent Argentinean history?

With a population of almost 13 million, Buenos Aires qualifies as what Saskia Sassen calls a "global city." According to Sassen, globalization is intricately related to geographic sites that facilitate and experience the unequal flow, distribution, and management of global capital, especially in cities in the southern hemisphere that have recently been integrated or become "hubs" of the global economy in the last thirty years.⁵¹⁹ Buenos Aires is one such city. To understand the interplay of local and global in Buenos Aires' urban culture, one must contextualize its spatial dynamics within Argentina's economic, political, and social history rather than attribute the extreme divisions between rich and poor, the suburban flight of elites, or

⁵¹⁹ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 26.

the rise of shanty towns to the failure of neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s.⁵²⁰ As the cosmopolitan capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires touts itself as the Paris of South America in guidebooks and even on the Argentinean Tourist Bureau website. From the tango that originated in its working-class immigrant barrios to its intimate café culture, Buenos Aires exudes an air of European cultural influence that can be traced from periods of mass European immigration in the 1890s.

Argentina's contemporary beauty culture did not appear out of thin air; its influences can be traced back to the grooming habits of European immigrants between 1875-1914 who immigrated en masse from Italy, Spain, Germany, and more recently from poorer countries that border Argentina.⁵²¹ Many of these newer migrants live in slums that have come to represent vast divisions of wealth in Buenos Aires and other global cities.⁵²² My research occurred primarily in the upper middle class, elite, and trendy neighborhoods of Retiro, Recoleta, and Palermo within the Federal Ciudad de Buenos Aires where pedestrian commercial shopping centers and avenues abound. I did not journey to the interior of Argentina (Las Pampas), nor southward to Patagonia, so it is within this limited spatial context of the Buenos Aires that I

⁵²⁰ Crot is specifically concerned with examining Buenos Aires local political institution within macroeconomic activities of the 1990s that shaped its urban social space. He argues that the polarization of Buenos Aires urban rich and poor is not new to contemporary Buenos Aires but housing efforts of the B.A. government over time have also facilitated these social divides. See Laurence Crot, 'Scenographic' and 'Cosmetic' Planning: Globalization and Territorial Restructuring in Buenos Aires." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 28, no. 3 (2006), 234..

⁵²¹ Gabriela Nouzeilles, and Graciela Montaldo. "General Introduction." In *The Argentine Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Gabriela and Graciela Montaldo Nouzeilles, 1-14, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002,) 7.

⁵²² For a description of Buenos Aires slums and the economic burden many of Argentineans newest migrants experience see sociologist Javier Auyero, "We Are All Cursed." In *The Argentinean Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Gabriela and Graciela Montaldo Nouzeilles, 509-18 (Duke and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

situate my analysis of Cosmetico Avon and its place in contemporary Argentinean beauty culture.⁵²³

Palermo and Recoleta's close proximity to the hustle and bustle of Buenos Aires' downtown city center possesses a range of spaces that invite Argentineans and tourists to participate in its commercial beauty culture. Guidebooks proudly proclaim Buenos Aires as host to some of the world's most glamorous and oldest department stores, and after trips upscale shopping plazas Patio Bulrich and Galeria Pacificos, it appears that European-inspired brand of glamour abound. More specifically, glamour signifies an elite lifestyle branding technique employed by a number of global cosmetics brands like Chanel, Lancôme, Yves St. Laurent, and La Roche that are sold either in independently operated kiosks that line the pavilions of these shopping malls, or in upscale Argentinean retail stores that specialize in selling global beauty brands.

Argentinean women do not have to frequent high end shopping malls to find global beauty brands. A high concentration of discount chain retail and drug stores also offer a range cosmetics and toiletry products for middle class consumers that include more affordable brands like Nivea, Revlon, and L'Oreal. A smaller selection of these global brands can also be found in locally owned "Perfumeries" that sell at-home hair dying kits, lipsticks, and hairbrushes and dot the side streets in many barrios. In between L'Oreal hair dye and Wella shampoo, shoppers can select local and regional brands, like Silkey, a shampoo manufactured by Argentina's Mudial Corporation. In the middle of this retail hubbub, sits Avon's lone franchised retail store that offers Avon's beauty, skin care, and toiletry products to pedestrians on Santa Fe Avenue.

⁵²³ Most importantly, I recognize that my observations do not account for economic or social meanings Argentinean women outside these economically privileged spaces experience, which is key given how cosmetics and toiletry preparations have evolved from being considered luxury to essential goods in developing nations like the United States.



Argentina's lone retail Avon Store in Buenos Aires in the upper middle class neighborhood of Barrio Norte (Personal Photo)

Located on one of the busiest shopping avenues in Buenos Aires, Avon's retail store sits across the street from a Burger King and a local Argentinean restaurant, a constellation of local and global retail stores that seem to characterize urban Buenos Aires pedestrian shopping spaces. Whether Argentinean women purchase commercial beauty products from an upscale shopping center, a retail drugstore, or a local perfumeries, Argentina's commercial culture has been transformed by branding power of multinational giants. Proctor and Gamble, Unilever, and Avon have fine-tuned segmented marketing techniques for Argentinean women, evidenced by their national advertising campaigns, the mix of local and global celebrity endorsers, and the seemingly ubiquitous presence of commercial beauty aids in Argentinean fashion magazines, kiosks, billboards, and television commercials.

Regional beauty industry trade fairs support Argentina's beauty industry. For over sixteen years, Cosmesur Beauty World Trade Fair has hosted a yearly exhibition in Buenos Aires

that focuses on “opening new markets and generating a major presence on a regional as well as international level.”⁵²⁴ Over 400 Argentinean cosmetics, perfume, and toiletry manufacturers and distributors network with each other and the 42,000 visitors who attend the fair. In 2004, it generated 2.4 billion U.S. dollars, a figure that increased 13.7% in 2005 and 2006.⁵²⁵ Not surprisingly, the Argentinean national government and the municipal government of Buenos Aires declared the fair of “national interest,” a claim supported by the fair’s 2008 official sponsors that included professional trade organizations, the Chamber of Exporters, the National Drug, Food, Medicine, and Technology Administration, and even the German, Costa Rican and Italian Embassies.⁵²⁶ Cosmesur Beauty World Trade Fair is a powerful reminder that Argentina’s beauty culture is informed and shaped by social relations and the interests of international trade organizations, state governments, and the beauty industry.

The coordinated efforts of the beauty industry to facilitate international trade and commerce have also influenced Argentinean women’s definition and identification with the word “beauty.” According to Dove’s “The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report,” 81% of Argentinean women feel that women today are expected to be more physically attractive than in their mother’s generation; over half feel that beauty is important for increased opportunities in their lives, and that “beauty” is a quality prized by both men and Argentinean society.⁵²⁷ The survey’s findings also show that commercialized representations of beauty in the mass media

⁵²⁴ "Cosmesur Beauty World: Buenos Aires." Accessed on November 7, 2008. Available at www.cosmesur.com.ar/english/index--eng.htm.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ This survey is part of a larger study and promotional campaign for one of Unilever’s most famous beauty brand’s, Dove. I discuss the implications of corporate sponsorship for what appears to be feminist or at the very least, grass roots resistance against normative beauty standards in the conclusion. For now, however, I refer to the study in order to better contextualize the degree of include global beauty companies have had on Argentinean beauty culture. See Nancy Etcoff, Susie Orbach, Jennifer Scott and Heidi D’Agostino. "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report, Findings of the Global Study on Women, Beauty, and Well-Being." edited by a Unilever Beauty Brand Dove, 2004, 1-48. Available online at www.campaignforrealbeauty.com, 26.

have changed Argentinean women's feeling and attitudes about their own physical beauty and begs the question: Where does Avon, the self-proclaimed company for women, fit in the cosmology of Argentina's beauty culture today?

Cosmetico Avon

Avon began operations in Argentina on September 20, 1970. Like many of its early operations, Cosmetico Avon introduced itself to Argentinean women through a limited eight page brochure that featured a select range of Avon beauty and skin care products.⁵²⁸ Although Argentina's recent economic and political history is rife with social upheavals, the 1970s are particularly troubling chapter marked by a military junta in 1976 that lead to eight years of an oppressive military dictatorship.⁵²⁹ Argentina's return to democracy in 1983 was followed by an unstable, boom and bust economy in the following decades that culminated with the devaluing of the Argentinean peso and hyperinflation in 2001 and 2003.⁵³⁰ Once celebrated by the IMF and WTO as the model case study of neoliberal trade policies, Argentina's economic calamities have raised a number of questions about the premise on which neoliberal economic policies have exacerbated economic inequality and poverty in developing countries.⁵³¹ When one combines Argentina's national, political and economic history with the multi-faceted role women have and continue to play in Argentinean political, economic, and social life, Avon becomes a site to explore how beauty, prized so highly Argentina's public sphere, intersects with women's private relationships in a volatile economic climate. How did Avon navigate the complicated cultural,

⁵²⁸ Keith Prevett, "Avon's 30th Anniversary" September 21 2000. Cosmetics Avon

⁵²⁹ For an overview of the military junta, violence, and political repression during this period see Nouzeilles, Gabriela and Graciela Montaldo. "State Violence." In *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture Politics*.

⁵³⁰ Rita Whitson, "Beyond the Crisis: Economic Globalization and Informal Work in Urban Argentina." *Journal of Latin America Geography* 6, no. 2 (2007): 123.

⁵³¹ See for example, the discussion in Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh with Thea Lee and the Institute for Policy Studies. *Field Guide to the Global Economy*, (New York: The New Press, 2005), 8 and Joseph Stiglitz's "Globalization's Discontents." In *The Globalization Reader*, edited by John Boli Frank J. Lechner, 2008, (London: Blackwell Publishing) and Whitson, "Beyond the Crisis," 121-124.

political, and economic circumstances that enabled Argentina to become one of the company's most highly regarded and profitable markets?

Despite the political and economic instability that has plagued Argentina, Cosmetics Avon has experienced steady profit gains and growth over the past forty years. Until 2003, Cosmetics Avon served as the regional hub for Avon's Latin American "Cluster Sur," but after Avon's 2005 organizational restructuring, Cosmetics Argentina now provides catalogues, training, and support for Avon's operations in Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.⁵³² Cosmetics Avon has two facilities; its headquarters in San Fernando, an industrial/residential suburb outside the city center of Buenos Aires, and a production plant in Moreno. It employs 1,500 associates and approximately 360,000 sales representatives who sell Avon in regional zones that extend to the southern-most region of South America, Patagonia. Like Avon's other operations, Cosmetics Avon is responsible for devising and implementing its external marketing (e.g., print and television advertisements, public relations events, etc.), including recruiting famous Argentines as its celebrity spokespeople. One can regularly see popular Argentinean talk show host, Susana Gimenez, thanking Cosmetics Avon for providing her make-up and skin care products at the conclusion of her popular daytime talk show.

Although Avon has streamlined its brand image globally, Argentinean executives are responsible for executing this vision locally. In Argentina, Cosmetics Avon's annual press conference created a high-end fashion show to introduce Avon's global "Hello Tomorrow" advertising campaign. Local journalists, designers, actors, and super models witnessed the unveiling of several of Avon's new beauty products and lent an air of glamour and prestige to

⁵³² Avon completed its global management restructuring, market integration, supply chain, direct selling, IT, and consolidated product line in 2005. See Bill George, Diana Mayer, and Andrew Mclean. "Andrea Jung: Empowering Avon Women (B)." *Harvard Business School Case Studies* 406 (2008).

Avon's local brand image.⁵³³ Other promotional events included an Avon-sponsored professional make-up artist competition at the Cosméticos Trade Fair; sponsoring fashion shows for popular Argentinean women's magazines *Para Ti* and *Sophia*; and providing official make-up for the Buenos Aires Theatre Company.⁵³⁴ Together, these events were designed to reframe Avon as beauty brand that catered not only to the masses, but also to elite Argentinean women.

Driving Cosmético Avon's local efforts is Avon Product's, Inc. long term strategy to increase media spending around the world with a coordinated plan to express "...that Avon is the company that best understands and empowers women"⁵³⁵ Avon already had brand name recognition in its more than 120 markets, but needed to synergize its powerful message of female empowerment in a coordinated global media campaign.⁵³⁶ Soho Square, a self-proclaimed "brand idea company" in New York spearheaded the creative efforts for Avon's "Hello Tomorrow" campaign and upped Avon's annual global media expenditures from \$135 million in 2005 to \$250 and \$340 million in 2006 and 2007.⁵³⁷ To increase its visibility around the world, Avon appointed Hollywood actress Reece Witherspoon as its Global Beauty Ambassador.⁵³⁸ Witherspoon, the ultimate Hollywood blond-haired, blue-eyed, girl-next door movie star thanks to global blockbusters like *Legally Blonde* launched its first integrated global campaign to unify Avon's brand image and "...present a consistent face of Avon to every audience in every country

⁵³³ "Regional Communication Workshop: Trece Paises, Tres Idioms, and Un solo Mensaje," 2008.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ "Avon Products, Inc. Form 8-k. United States Security and Exchange Commission; Washington DC, February 15, 2007." 2007 Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010.

⁵³⁶ Stuart Elliot, "Avon Comes Calling with a New Campaign." *New York Times*, March 15 2007.

⁵³⁷ 2007 Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010; Soho Square company website. Accessed on April 17, 2010. Available at <http://www.sohosq.com/>.

⁵³⁸ 2007 Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010.

where we do business.”⁵³⁹ In August of 2008, Witherspoon’s vibrant red smile said “hello” to Argentineans with Avon’s Ultra Color Rich Extra Plump lipstick in a billboard over one Buenos Aires busiest downtown intersections. Avon’s also unveiled its Hello Tomorrow Fund in the United States on International Women’s Day on March 7, 2007, and later to more than a dozen countries.⁵⁴⁰



2008 “Hello Tomorrow” Advertising Campaign in Buenos Aires featuring Avon Global Beauty Ambassador, Reese Witherspoon (Personal Photo)

Avon’s philanthropic activities as “the company for women-globally” are executed in local Avon subsidiaries around the world. Cosmetico Argentina’s Avon Foundation hosts their own Avon Walk for the Cure and sponsor a mobile breast cancer detection unit that travels to rural towns where women often have limited access to healthcare facilities. In addition to

⁵³⁹ Ibid., ii.

⁵⁴⁰ According to Avon’s corporate website, the U.S. campaign ended in 2009:” U.S. *Hello Tomorrow Fund* will award \$5,000 every week to an individual who has submitted a compelling application to help realize a program, project or idea that empowers women and ultimately improves society. More than 8,000 U.S. individuals—women and men—have applied for the 104 weekly awards. Similar programs of varying award frequencies and amounts are empowering women worldwide as well.” See . <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-38-Hello-Tomorrow-Fund>. Accessed March 8, 2010.

providing information on prevention and early treatment, Avon's breast cancer detection unit also provides free mammograms.⁵⁴¹ The cumulative effects of Avon's forty year history and recent public relations events is that 8 out of 10 Argentinean women consume at least one Avon product.⁵⁴² And yet, while Cosmetico Avon's public relations efforts may have extended Avon's appeal to a broader demographic of upper middle class women, it has also steadily increased the number of representatives to Avon's ranks since its founding in 1970.

Avon currently leads Argentinean direct sales industry where it competes with local direct selling organizations like Argentina's Tsu; Brazil's Natura, a skin care and cosmetics, and global competitors Amway and Mary Kay.⁵⁴³ After forty years of active recruiting and increased sales, Avon has established a significant lead amongst its competitors. Like Avon, these companies rely on a sales force comprised primarily of women, who sell everything from cosmetics to apparel. On the retail end, Avon competes against affordable retail brands like Revlon and L'Oreal.

By 2002 unemployment, underemployment, and informal employment rose to record highs. Over 25 percent of the working population in Argentina was unemployed while over 50 percent of the population lived in poverty.⁵⁴⁴ Just as Avon positioned itself as a form of part-time, flexible work in the United States during periods of economic downturns, Cosmetics

⁵⁴¹ "Hello Tomorrow," Cosmetico Avon's History Power Point Presentation. Courtesy Cosmetics Avon.

⁵⁴² Cosmetics Avon's recent public relations, advertising, and philanthropy efforts increased visibility and prestige to Avon's brand identity over 127 percent between 2006 and 2007. This information is from Avon's 2005 *Global Tracking Survey* and cited in "Regional Communication Workshop: Trece Paises, Tres Idioms, and Un solo Mensaje." 2008. Cosmetics Avon. Because I do not have access to the survey, I am unsure about the specific questions or methodology the survey used to measure local women's perceptions and attitudes about Avon's brand identity.

⁵⁴³ "Work: Home Business." *Para Ti Online*, April 07 2003; Accessed on March 6, 2010. Available at <http://www.parati.com.ar/nota.php?ID=7831>.

⁵⁴⁴ Whitson, "Beyond the Crisis: Economic Globalization and Informal Work in Urban Argentina," 122. Specifically, Whitson argues that "...high levels of informal work which characterized Argentina in 2002 may also been seen as resulting from and responding to trend of globalization of the economy and neoliberalization in a more direct manner as well, as they constitute a critical component to the roll-back of the neoliberal state and the flexibilization of work processes more generally." (132).

Avon expanded recruitment efforts significantly increased during Argentina's market crashes in 2001 and 2002.⁵⁴⁵ In 1999, Cosmetico Avon employed 160,000 representatives, a figure that rose 22 percent and resulted in additional 100,000 representatives during the market crashes of 2002. The following year garnered another 100,000 representatives.⁵⁴⁶ This resiliency resulted in 14 million in profits for Cosmetics Argentina in 2002.⁵⁴⁷ Cosmetico Avon's competitors, including Mary Kay, Arbell, and Natura also experienced a boost in recruits as many Argentinean women sought additional forms of employment. *Para Ti*, a leading Argentinean women's magazine described direct selling's new appeal for Argentinean women in a 2003 article:

In the last twelve months, this mode of doing business at home became the source of income for many women. Faced with devastating unemployment statistics, as women we tend to be more active than men. Rather than waste time on regrets, many prefer to "do." In a direct marketing plan that translates to call friends or acquaintances to sell beauty products. This will expand the sales network by leaps and bounds.. Because, besides having the vanity in our personal backpack, we also have Argentine solidarity.⁵⁴⁸

Much like the "compassionate capitalism" discussed in the previous chapter, Argentina's economic upheavals helped direct sales organizations champion themselves as the answer to women's economic woes by offering them the chance to participate in a female-driven, collective effort to help support themselves and the Argentinean nation. Calling upon women as guardians of the nation is a common theme deployed in various national defense and/or war making enterprises. In Argentina, images of woman, especially

⁵⁴⁵ After several years of economic recession in the late 1990s, Argentina entered a period of hyperinflation; the value of Argentinean peso had plummeted on the world market, and portenos were growing increasingly distrusting of the national governments' ability to resurrect the economy's downward spiral.

⁵⁴⁶ 2002 Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010, 22.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.,22.

⁵⁴⁸ Originally written and published in Spanish for Argentinean readers in "Work: Home Business." *Para Ti Online*, April 07 2003; Available at <http://www.parati.com.ar/nota.php?ID=7831>. Translated by author.

mothers, have played symbolic and political resistance movements..⁵⁴⁹ *Para Ti's* article, much like the rhetoric of empowerment and social change Avon advocates globally, provide insight on how direct-selling blurs the private and public identities of Argentinean women and capitalizes on their social networks; the presumed pleasure they derive as participants in their beauty culture; and their commitment to a female-inspired national solidarity in the wake of larger, global economic forces. From 2002 to 2004, Argentina's economic crisis proved to be a boon for Cosméticos Avon. When combined with the sales of its other Latin American subsidiaries, Avon's revenue in Latin America increased steadily from 2002 to 2005.⁵⁵⁰ Cosmético Avon's successful recruitment strategy attests to the persuasive power direct selling continues to offer Argentinean women and may help explain why the Argentineans with whom I spoke thought Avon (pronounced in an Argentinean Spanish with a short "a") was a local company rather than a multinational corporation.

Similar to the messages its public relations video proclaimed a decade earlier, Cosméticos Avon recruits women by selling idea of economic empowerment and female solidarity, themes that converge at the nexus of the personal sales experience. To this end, managing and motivating its sales force remains an important part of Avon's business. Cosmético Avon's representative sales meetings, reward programs, and e-newsletters appear to rely on the same basic emotional management techniques Avon and other direct selling

⁵⁴⁹ More recently, the Association of Las Madres has participated in a number of transnational movements to advocate social and economic justice for women around the world, including the inauguration of International Women's Day at the United Nations. See their association's website at <http://www.madres.org/>. Accessed March 10, 2010. For a historical account of Las Madres de Plaza del Mayo see Hebe de Bonafini and Matilde Sanchez. "The Madwomen at the Plaza De Mayo." In *The Argentina Reader*, edited by Gabriela and Graciela Montaldo Nouzeilles, 429-39, (Durham and London Duke University Press 2002).

⁵⁵⁰ 2005 Avon Product, Inc. *Annual Report* available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010, 18.

organizations have developed and refined to motivate their female labor force. Argentina's sales representatives are encouraged to attend sales meetings where they learn insider secrets about Avon's products and sales incentive prizes. Touted as social events, these sales meetings serve as a way to foster a community of female solidarity where Argentinean women (and the occasional male) bond over a shared sense of purpose around the social and economic "cause" of selling beauty. Many of Cosméticos Avon's local management techniques appear relatively similar to those used in Avon's early international forays in Latin America, although now Argentinean Zone Managers now use digital projection systems, power points, and virtual scripts to share incentive prizes and product information with representatives. In Campaign 15 in August of 2008, for example, representatives learned about Reece Witherspoon's responsibilities as Avon's new Global Beauty Ambassador. Witherspoon's personality is described as resembling that of all Avon women: multifaceted, passionate, and entrepreneurial.⁵⁵¹ Representatives also learned about Avon's new lipsticks and incentive prizes for the fifteenth anniversary of Avon's popular anti-aging cream, *Anew*. Like other anniversary product specials used in *Panoramas* and *Outlooks*, the prizes range in scope and size. Selling two or more units of Anew Ultimate Elixir earned representatives a watch; six or more a set of decorative kitchen plates, and twenty or more an entire formal dinner setting.⁵⁵² The three highest winners from each zone received notebook computers, while the national winners earned a trip to New York to visit Avon's laboratories.

Outside of the notebook computers, many of Avon's reward prizes, especially the trip to Suffern, New Jersey to Avon's laboratories, are similar to unifying, community-oriented reward

⁵⁵¹ The brochure noted that these characteristics, combined with her global fame, would help Witherspoon serve as the Honorary President of the Avon Foundation where she would champion Avon's causes for women; serve as the face of Avon's beauty products in its global advertising campaigns; and support their work as Avon sales representatives. See Guion de Conferencia: Campana 14, August 2008.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 12.

programs Avon developed in the 1950s. Rewards for its smaller programs included house wares like cordless phones and tablecloths, echoing of the house wares Avon encouraged its representatives to aspire to in the 1950s and 1960s, and that continue to frame Avon representatives as homemakers. Cosmetico Avon's Circle of Distinction Program, a program similar to the President's Club Avon developed in the 1960s, continues to reward top selling Argentinean representatives who achieve Avon's highest levels of excellence, overcome their goals, and meet new challenges.⁵⁵³ In keeping with the woman-centered history it developed in the 1970s, members also receive a porcelain figurine of Mrs. Albee and the opportunity to travel to Buenos Aires and meet Cosmetics Avon executives and frame representatives as vital to Avon's local corporate culture and decision-making processes.

Argentinean representatives are also encouraged to attend beauty clinics where Cosmetico Avon's beauty consultants introduce Avon's new beauty and skin care products and train representatives on how to improve their personal image and sales.⁵⁵⁴ These beauty clinics have evolved since the 1950s when they introduced women to eye makeup and mascara for the first time, but their basic function and purpose remains the same. Avon's beauty "experts" lend representatives credibility, authority, and promote Avon's prescriptive, yet adaptable, beauty advice representatives can show their friends, family members, and coworkers. Even though Reece Witherspoon is Avon's official Global Beauty Ambassador, individual sales representatives still serve as the "faces" for Avon. While not required, image training provides sales representatives from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds to receive Avon's version of workplace training, a process that in essence, transforms them into beauty ambassadors who are

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁵⁴ "Regional Communication Workshop: Trece Paises, Tres Idioms, and Un solo Mensaje." Courtesy of Cosmetics Avon, 2008.

encouraged to go forth and share their knowledge and insider information about Avon's beauty and skin care products.

Cosmetico Avon adapted to Argentina's women's lives and need for economic support in the wake of Argentina's economic crisis that many economists cite as the result of failed neoliberal lending policies by the IMF and World Bank. The personal, intimate, one-on-one relationships direct sellers create with their customers allows organizations like Avon to both respond, and profit, from women seeking additional income in the wake of economic upheavals in local, site-specific contexts. This flexibility, when combined with exacerbated divisions between the world's richest and poorest populations and its impact on women, help explain Avon's appeal around the world. Avon representatives currently sell Avon's products in 65 countries and Avon distributes its products in another 40.⁵⁵⁵ In a letter to Avon's share holders last year, Avon CEO Andrea Jung described Avon as the "largest economic engine for women on earth" and outlined strategies in Avon's "recession playbook" to combat – and capitalize – on the global economic downturn.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ "Letter to Shareholders," 2009 *Avon Product, Inc. Annual Report* available at Avon's corporate website, <http://www.avoncompany.com/investor/annualreport/archive.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2010, 22.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. First, Avon launched its largest representative recruiting campaign in local spot advertisements around the world that featured testimonials and experiences of Avon representatives. It also plans on increasing its presence at opportunity fairs and harnessing the power of online advertising to target possible recruits. To retain its status as the largest direct selling organization in the world, Avon recently created a hybrid system where representatives can sell Avon with its traditional model (e.g., calling on friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc.) or by joining its Sales Leadership Program where they earn commissions by selling products *and* recruiting, training, mentoring, and overseeing new representatives. In this model, representatives, rather than a centrally managed team of district managers, are rewarded for prospecting and overseeing new recruits. Today, more than fifty of Avon's markets have implemented its Sales Leadership Program which follows the general trend within the direct selling industry over the last twenty years. To remain ahead of its competitors, a multi-level marketing channel is imperative for Avon's continued growth. But, it also relinquishes some of Avon's influence in managing and motivating its representatives through its local district and zone managers in favor of relying on Avon representatives to manage and motivate each other. Pei Chia Lan's study of multilevel marketing in Taiwan shows new techniques of "emotional management" have emerged as multi-level marketers discipline themselves and other distributors in the absence of a centrally-organized, bureaucratic corporation. See Pei-Chan Lan, Networking Capitalism: Network Construction and Control Effects." *The Sociological Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2002): 166.

Avon's district and zone managers continue to play a pivotal role in helping Avon manage its transnational network of representatives and rely on many of the same community building strategies to train and imbue representatives with a shared sense of purpose and uplift. For every billboard or television commercial that features Reece Witherspoon or Avon's new advanced anti-aging technology, Cosmetico Avon has trained and encouraged hundreds of thousands of women to capitalize on their insider knowledge and solicit business from people within their local professional and personal networks. Again, the degree to which women internalize or resist Avon's messages of economic uplift and empowerment is difficult to ascertain, but it is clear that Avon's emotional management strategies have remained more or less the same since Avon expanded its operations outside the United States in the 1950s. Some women may sell Avon because of the messages of female solidarity and community makes them feel as though they are part of something bigger than simply selling beauty products, while others may find it a legitimate and flexible way to earn money, furnish their homes with incentive prizes, or an opportunity to participate in Avon's global mission to empower women.

When Avon enters a new market today, Avon's primary focus remains on building a representative network through word of mouth and personal contacts before launching any major advertising campaigns.⁵⁵⁷ Ideally, Avon likes to have one representative per 1000 residents before it introduces its social message of empowerment to the general public. In this respect, Avon's "on the ground" operations are similar to the ones it launched in 1954 but are now supported with an expensive global media campaign, complete with celebrity endorsers, coordinated philanthropy events, and alliances with women's organizations that transcend national and economic borders.

⁵⁵⁷ When Avon enters a new market, it designates a country manager whose efforts are supported by a public relations extravaganza called "Open Day" where local women are invited to learn about Avon.

Around the world, Avon's brand of "beauty" is advertised as a progressive social cause women around the world can feel good about participating in because by doing so, they empower other women economically, fund breast cancer research, help protest domestic violence, and support Avon's other women-centered philanthropic activities. Avon's current brand image delivers a powerful and socially relevant message that departs from merely serving the beauty needs of individual women. Avon proclaims to provide economic opportunity for all women and espouses the same rhetoric by its male executives who envisioned Avon as delivering free enterprise and democracy to "every door in the free world." Today, Avon's global beauty empire is managed by a woman CEO and a Board of Directors that includes a sizeable number of female executives and community leaders. However, they inherited a corporate legacy created by men who positioned and profited from women as the cultural brokers of Avon's "at home" selling system.

Avon, and other multinational corporations saw the economic advantage of introducing shampoo, lipstick, and toothpaste as yardsticks of civilization. As a result, they have generated a demand for commercial beauty and personal care products around the world. In the Amazon Rainforests in Brazil, for example, Avon representatives call on people whose geographically isolated lives are far removed from Sao Paulo's bustling commercial culture, but are still accessible to Avon Ladies who travel by boats to deliver Avon perfumes and other products. In lieu of cash payment, these Amazonian Avon representatives rely on local bartering systems in exchange for their products. Maria, who was interviewed as part of a 1997 documentary explained that she accepts gold dust from miners, and will trade a bottle of cologne for ten kilos of flour.⁵⁵⁸ Her reasons for selling Avon echoes other Avon testimonials: "My husband hates

⁵⁵⁸ "Women: A True Story the Gender Tango." In *Films for the Humanities and Sciences*. United States, 1997.

what I do he doesn't want his wife to work. He doesn't give me what I need. When I get home, we fight about it. But I need money for me and the kids”⁵⁵⁹ Testimonials like this support Avon's carefully constructed corporate persona it has developed and refined over the years that positions women as agents of their own financial destiny. It also underscores Avon's continued reliance on local women to insert itself in the few parts of the world where mass consumption of commercial hygiene products and beauty aids has yet to emerge as a central feature of modern life.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion: Transnational Beauty Ambassadors

Over the last fifty years Avon has adapted its corporate identity to represent itself as company that embraces, supports, and champions women's causes. In the process of recreating itself as "the" company for women, it has adapted this strategy to solicit new to promote the sale of its beauty products. But, as Avon's history shows, this process has been long in the making. During the Cold War Avon's early public relation efforts created a distinct personality that reflected the United States' culture of domestic containment and capitalized on women's patriotic and civic responsibility to their homes and family life. Avon framed its representatives as "ladies" who delivered and educated women about new beauty regimens in the growing number of suburban communities around the United States. Avon advertised itself as a service-oriented organization that could help women to combat the drudgery of her domestic responsibilities without encroaching on her primary commitment to her husband and family. Avon built a similar personality as it introduced itself to women in countries around the world during the 1950s and 1960s.

During the early twentieth century, U.S. personal care and cosmetics companies seeking new markets outside the United States often announced the arrival of innovative products guaranteed to offer women new solutions to age old problems. Avon was one of the first U.S. beauty companies to champion the consumption of commercial beauty aids and toiletries- and direct selling - as a way to bring modern hygiene and beauty to women in Latin America. Its male managers promoted the idea that beauty was accessible, affordable, and could help women's dreams come true. Buttressed by this paternal ideology of economic uplift, Avon used television commercials and other media outlets to introduce its concept of "at home selling" and to tout quality and prestige of its innovative products. However, Avon's early transnational

beauty ambassadors delivered more than lipstick and perfume; they were also engaged in the geopolitical project of selling Avon's U.S.-centered ideologies that civilized, modern living resided in the mass consumption of beauty aids. With the help of local women, Avon inserted its U.S.-inspired beauty habits into women's private homes, enabling it to surpass the influence of U.S. companies that relied exclusively on the mass media.

Back in the United States, Avon realized its domestic market of middle-class, white, suburban housewives could not sustain its desired growth. Racial tensions, as well as increasing discretionary incomes of African Americans, required Avon to revamp the corporate persona it had so carefully developed and maintained during the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1970s, buying and selling "beauty" became an equal opportunity enterprise at Avon. Avon's Public Relations Department played a key role in disseminating Avon's proactive workplace discrimination and hiring policies and responsible for keeping abreast of how to best represent Avon to the public in an era of rapid economic and cultural upheaval. Avon was less timely in its response to the women's liberation movement, yet it too, forced Avon to recognize the limitations of its middle-class, housebound image communicated to the hundreds of thousands of American women flocking to the workforce. The economic and social changes of the 1970s, forced Avon to recognize that its appeal resided in advertising itself as an economic safety net to women seeking part-time work to support their families.

These social movements required Avon, from a pragmatic and strategic point of view, to reframe itself as a progressive company that supported and enabled any woman, regardless of race, age, social class, or geography, to achieve financial independence and personal fulfillment. They fundamentally altered the way Avon talked about itself as an organization, as well as how – and what – Avon communicated about itself to the public. The 1970s also marked a decade of

international expansion in a decade of economic turbulence, a strategy that proved necessary to stave off declining domestic profits in the coming years. During the 1970s, Avon's male managers continued to promote direct selling's entrepreneurial possibilities, "universal" appeal, and flexibility for women, especially those in developing markets. Avon Products, Inc. emerged as a multinational corporation that knew no borders and viewed the women of the world as potential new recruits and consumers.

Today Avon relies on a multifaceted, synergized global branding campaign to promote itself as "the" company for women, a process that positions Avon as an advocate for women's social causes rather than a global manufacturer of commercial beauty products. In many ways this strategy mimics feminist grassroots efforts to unite women across and between state borders to protest women's economic disenfranchisement. Representing and serving the needs of women across the globe has led Avon to form partnership with a variety of non-profit organizations dedicated to women's issues, including its recent private/public partnership with the United Nation's Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.⁵⁶⁰ This supranational alliance, much like Avon's overall mission and vision statement, transcends state borders to unite women in a common cause while Avon's corporate philanthropy and public relations build local support and awareness for Avon in site-specific contexts.

Avon's male product managers confidence in 1965 that "women will continue to assert and equate their femininity" through the consumption and purchase of beauty products has not only become a mainstay of Avon's business model, but is an ideology Avon continues to champion as it seeks new markets in places like China, where its growing middle class has proven to be a lucrative addition to Avon's beauty business. Yet, unlike other global beauty

⁵⁶⁰ Avon's donation of one million dollars in 2009 is the largest corporate grant to the Trust Fund since it began in 1996. Accessed April 19, 2010. Available at <http://www.un.org/works/sub3.asp?lang=en&id=120>.

brands, Avon mediates its corporate discourse through the voluntary efforts of its female sales force. From the contact information Avon solicited to launch its international operations to the transnational branding strategies that currently unite Avon global sales force, Avon's global expansion has centered upon its adaptable, yet uniform management and recruitment of women into its ranks.⁵⁶¹ It is a loosely bound, tightly monitored organization that promotes economic uplift and sells the idea of belonging and affiliation with an organization whose mission and vision surpasses women's individual beauty needs. In many ways, Avon representatives participate in an imagined "Avon" community that functions similar to Benedict Anderson's account of modern-nation states. They are encouraged and regularly reminded of Avon's anniversary celebrations, collective history, and memorial events through Avon's unique form of print capitalism, its representative newsletters, that are created and distributed locally, yet reinforce Avon's transnational mission to generate demand and sell its products. Avon's transnational beauty ambassadors mediate these critical differences within the context of their local beauty cultures and through their intimate relationships and personal connections. In return, Avon continues to have unfettered access to women's intimate and private grooming habits in regions around the world.

Whether Avon Ladies are a pawn in the larger world of corporate beauty capitalism is a subject that requires additional investigation. What is clear, however, is that Avon has historically and continues to capitalize on women's personal relationships as the core of its business. As it successfully exported its products and direct selling system outside the United States, it expanded the geographic scope of women's local networks and channeled them into a transnational commercial enterprise that eclipses the boundaries of one nation-state or one

marketable version of beauty. From its earliest international ventures in the 1950s, Avon's transnational class of male executives have relied on women around the world to help generate demand for Avon's products, and along the way, aligned their efforts with women's universal right to participate in free enterprise and position cosmetics as potent symbols of women's democratic freedom. The beauty ambassadors who serve on behalf of Avon's beauty empire, even if only for a limited time, underscore the degree to which women have been enlisted to sustain and facilitate one U.S. company's quest to build a global beauty empire, a process that continues to be imbued with ideological meanings, prescriptive gender norms, and notions of difference.

*Appendix A*⁵⁶²

Avon's Vision: to be the company that best understands and satisfies the product, service and self-fulfillment needs of women—globally.

Avon's Mission:

- The Global Beauty Leader
- The Women's Choice for Buying
- The Premier Direct Seller
- The Best Place to Work
- The Largest Women's Foundation
- The Most Admired Company

⁵⁶² "What we Stand For," Avon Product Inc. Accessed April 18, 2010. Available at <http://responsibility.avoncompany.com/page-13-Our-Vision-and-Mission>.

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